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ALL THAT GLITTERS

NOVELS BY FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES

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THE GREAT TRADITION. *Twenty-fifth Thousand.*

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ALL THAT GLITTERS

BY

FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES

*Author of "Fielding's Folly," "The Great Tradition,"
"Christian Marlowe's Daughter," "Honor
Bright," etc., etc.*

1942

EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE
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TO

EVELYN DIXON DILLARD

WHOSE KINDNESS HAS HELPED ME TO KEEP ON
BELIEVING THAT WHILE ALL THAT GLITTERS IS
NOT GOLD THERE IS AFTER ALL MUCH REAL GOLD
STILL LEFT IN THE WORLD

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ALL THAT GLITTERS

Book One

PART I

CHAPTER I

"Yes, this is Senator Morton's apartment. No, this isn't Mrs. Morton speaking. It's Helen Morton. Wouldn't you like me to call my mother? Why, that's very kind of you, but I really—— Hold the line just a minute, won't you, please? Mrs. Elliot? Oh, I'm so sorry—Mrs. *Endicott*."

No one had paid much attention to the telephone at first. Senator Morton was gathering up papers to put in his briefcase and he knew that if he laid them down he would be sure to disarrange their sequence, or overlook some item of correspondence which was important. He had his wife's fondness for order, without her ability to keep it. He had decided to go down to the Senate Office Building for the morning, to "run through his mail" and "look over the ground"; and having come, with some difficulty, to this important decision, and disclosed it to his family, he steeled himself against the diversion of anything so trivial as a telephone call.

Mrs. Morton was unpacking. She was very particular as to how her dresses were hung and her chest of drawers arranged. Her New England relatives called her "poison neat"; but she referred to herself, bridleing slightly, as "merely methodical." She took care of her clothes in the same way that she did her club work. She was methodical about that, too, and the vaguer members of the Tobias Emory Ladd Chapter N.S.D.A.R., of which she had been regent before she became state registrar, sometimes murmured among themselves that her methods were inexorable, although they never denied that she "got results." When the telephone in her new Washington apartment began its insistent ringing, she did not even hear it, because she was so intensively occupied with "getting results" in her wardrobe.

Bob Morton had just stepped downstairs to buy a Sunday paper, telling his sister, Helen, that he would be back in a jiffy. But apparently he had been delayed. Helen had not noticed that there was a very pretty girl at the news-stand of the arabesque lobby in the Majestic, the ostentatious apartment-hotel where they were installed, "at least temporarily," as the *Examiner* had put it, in announcing the Mortons' arrival through its society columns. If she had, she would not have been astonished at the delay, for Bob's susceptibility, under the circumstances, had long been evident to Helen.

Not that she considered this a failing. He never appeared to succumb weakly, but always kept a cocksure air about him whatever he was doing. Helen envied that air. She knew that she was the only inefficient member of a highly executive family, without the consolation of realizing that she was the flower of it.

She was upset before she answered the telephone at all. She had not recovered from the depression that had engulfed her when she left her own home on Laurel Avenue, in Mortonville, Arkansas, or the shyness that overwhelmed her in Washington. She missed her own schoolmates and her own neighbours, and she was sure that no strangers would ever take their place with her. She did not want to speak to anyone yet, even over the telephone. She wanted to retreat, as far as possible, from the unfamiliar activities to which her mother looked forward with such zest. But since nobody else answered the relentless call, it was obvious that she ought to do so, and in her haste she stumbled over some suitcases that were still stacked in the dim entrance hall, where the telephone stood on a small veneered table. She was startled as well as hurt by her fall, and she was still more startled when an imperious voice came to her over the wire, bidding the Morton family *en masse* to a luncheon in honour of the French ambassador.

The unknown lady to whom the imperious voice belonged spoke in such a peremptory manner that her summons suggested a command rather than an invitation; and she had evidently taken great umbrage when Helen failed to catch her name. The girl laid down the receiver in real distress, and hurried towards Mrs. Morton's room, stumbling over the suitcases a second time on the way.

"Mother," she said breathlessly, "there's a Mrs. Elliot—I mean a Mrs. Endicott—on the telephone. She wants us to come to luncheon at half-past one today—all of us. It didn't seem to enter her head that we might decline. I don't have to go, do I? I'm sure Father wouldn't want to go either. You and Bob could go without us, couldn't you?"

Mrs. Morton adjusted her new slate-grey afternoon dress carefully on a padded hanger before she turned. Nevertheless, Helen was instantly aware of her mother's gratification. There was something about the older woman's very deliberation which betrayed her pleasure.

"Mrs. Endicott?" she inquired. She spoke precisely and clearly, for she had taken a course of twelve lessons in enunciation, so that the members of the Tobias Emory Ladd Chapter N.S.D.A.R. would always be able to hear her least utterance. "Mrs. Eliphalet Endicott?"

"I don't know. She didn't say. She talked as if anyone would know who she was if she just said Mrs. Endicott. Oh, Mother, you really don't think I have to——"

"Then it is Mrs. Eliphalet Endicott. Naturally she would speak

like that," Mrs. Morton observed, disregarding her daughter's plea entirely and giving a final touch to the slate-grey afternoon dress.

"She's still waiting on the telephone, Mother."

"I am preparing to go to the telephone, Helen, as fast as I can conveniently."

Mrs. Morton did not stumble over the suitcases. She walked well and unhurriedly, her shoulders back and her abdomen compressed. She never made the social mistake, which she found occasion to deplore among many of her fellow-regents, of wearing the blue ribbon which was her badge of office on unsuitable occasions; but her carriage always indicated that she was ready to assume this badge any time and anywhere.

"This is Mrs. Morton speaking," she said in her best platform voice. Then she waited for Mrs. Endicott to repeat her invitation. "It is very kind of you to think of newcomers like ourselves," she went on, after this had been duly done. "Very kind indeed. I appreciate it. Of course I have seen a great deal of Washington life myself, as I have made it a point, for twenty years, to come regularly to the sessions of the Continental Congress every spring. But my husband and my son and daughter are all complete strangers here. They will be most appreciative also. Till one-thirty then. We shan't have the slightest excuse for being late, shall we, being such near neighbours of yours? Not that unpunctuality is one of my failings. I have always told the members of my Chapter——"

Mrs. Morton was not able to tell Mrs. Endicott what she had always told the members of her Chapter because at this point there was a click which made it evident that the prospective hostess had hung up. But if the new senator's wife was in the least aggrieved by this action, she did not betray it as she addressed her daughter.

"Helen," she said. "Helen."

"Yes, Mother."

"I hope you are not going to make matters difficult for me, here in Washington."

"I don't mean to make matters difficult for you, Mother. But I do wish you and Bob could go to this party alone. He'll be sure to like it, just as you will. But you know how Father hates parties. And you know that I——"

"Robert," said Mrs. Morton. "Robert."

Mr. Morton was just opening the front door, his briefcase, now bulging, carefully in hand. He closed the door and turned.

"Mrs. Eliphalet Endicott has been kind enough to invite us all to take luncheon with her today at one-thirty o'clock. She lives in that magnificent mansion, built on medieval lines, which crowns the crest of this hill."

Mr. Morton emitted a sound which was half-way between a snarl and a groan, but he made no direct response to his wife.

"I have always heard that she is most hospitably inclined to

outsiders," Mrs. Morton went on, disregarding the sound. "Indeed, I understand that she scans the social columns carefully for items about new official arrivals."

"But I haven't sent the newspapers any items about my arrival. I'm a busy man, Edna. I've got a big job on my hands. The legality of two senators' elections has been challenged. It's a question whether they can be seated or not. I've got to study the matter, or I shan't be able to vote fairly. And this Farm Bill that's coming up is mighty important to me. Arkansas would have a lot to gain if agricultural relief went through. If I come home from the Senate Office Building in the middle of the day to go to a *luncheon*——"

"I sent an item to the newspaper," Mrs. Morton replied, still speaking with the utmost self-control. "I know how busy you are, Robert, and I shall spare you the annoyance of attending to such details, in as far as I possibly can. But I told you candidly that one of the reasons I chose the Majestic as our temporary residence was because of its proximity to Greystone Towers. I hoped for such a gesture of hospitality on the part of Mrs. Endicott, knowing how much it would mean to us. But I did not venture to assume that it would come so promptly."

A key rattled in a lock, and the door of the apartment was flung breezily open and closed with a noisy swing. Mrs. Morton continued to make her well-modulated voice carry, without raising it, through the shrillness of her son's whistle.

"Bob," she said benignly. "Bob."

"Hello, there! What's up?"

"Mrs. Eliphalet Endicott of Greystone Towers——"

"You mean the rich widow from Colorado whose old man made his pile in patent pills?"

"In a democratic country, Bob, like the one in which we are privileged to live, because our forefathers were brave enough to perish for their ideals——"

"Easy, Ma, easy. The marble marker's all in place at the old Presbyterian burying ground, and the orator of the day wants to get on with his own speech."

"What I was about to say, my son, when you interrupted, was that in a country like this wealth springs from all kinds of sources."

"Well, just so long as it springs! What's the old girl got in the way of a family?"

"She has a very beautiful granddaughter who is making her debut this year. The young girl's name is Veronica. I have always thought it was one of the noblest names in the English language. And I have a strong feeling that Veronica and Helen will become close friends."

"But, Mother! I'm not going to come out! You know you promised——"

"I promised that no one would *force* you to come out, Helen.

But I counted on the fact that once you were here, you would see for yourself that you should be suitably presented to society, that such a course would be inevitable."

"I ought to have known better than to believe you! I ought to have known that in the end you'd make me do it!"

The girl was sobbing as she spoke. Her brother put his arm around her, good-naturedly.

"Come on now. Snap out of it! What do you say to coming down to the office with the old gent and me for a coupla hours? That's all there'll be left now, before we have to climb up the hill to Cascara Castle."

Mrs. Morton, who had paid no attention to Helen's outburst, gave her son an annihilating glance which fell wide of its mark. He disregarded his mother's dignified departure from the scene, and went on patting his sister's shoulders. He was not an especially fine-fibred young man; he was inclined to wear loud clothes and use loud language and to keep loose company when he was out of bounds. But as his father's secretary, while the new senator had been Governor of Arkansas, he had proved himself unexpectedly capable, trustworthy and resourceful; now he was beginning his work, in the same capacity, at the Senate Office Building with zeal and enthusiasm. He genuinely admired his father, and was proud to serve him; but he did not begin to love him as he loved his sister. All her life he had petted her, shielded and supported her. He was gentle with her even when he teased her.

"I don't feel like going down to the Senate Office Building, Bob. I don't feel like doing anything."

"Well, just so long as you don't cry. Look here, I can't go off while you have that fountain turned on. You might drown before I got back."

He produced a large linen handkerchief with a checked border, and began mopping her tear-stained cheeks, stroking back her disordered hair at the same time with his free hand. It was pretty hair, pale brown in colour, and extremely soft and fine. He often teased her about it, calling it "baby hair." But he admired it, and loved to get his hands on it. He also admired her skin, which was very delicately tinted, and her eyes, which were blue and guileless, and Helen knew that he did. With her own lack of self-confidence, his admiration meant a great deal to her. She raised her head and kissed him, gratefully.

"You're awfully good to me, Bob. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You'll never have to do without me. I'm sort of fond of you too. I guess you must be a pretty nice girl. But you mustn't be a crybaby. And you must let me run along now. The old gent's waiting for me. He says he needs me too. I've sort of got the idea that I'm a valuable fellah, the way you two talk. Now I want to see you

at the window waving your handkerchief to me when I get outside. I'll look back. And I'll *be* back, in time to see you through the luncheon. I bet it'll be more fun than you think for, at that."

Helen stood at the window for some moments after her father and brother had disappeared down the hill. The furnished apartment which the Mortons had taken "at least temporarily," contained a long central hallway with three bedrooms and three baths on one side of it, and a living-room, dining-room, pantry and kitchen on the other. At the end of the hallway, directly opposite the front door, was a small reception-room, and this, in turn, led out on a small balcony. There was nothing remarkable about the apartment itself, and its upholstered furniture, covered in velour and tapestry, its veneered dining-room set, and its French walnut beds adorned with curlicues, were all graceless and stereotyped in style. But the view from the balcony and the windows was very pleasant. To the west there was a large vacant area which showed signs of eventually becoming a park; a statue rose here and there in it, and there was a glimpse of a reflecting pool. To the south rose the imposing pseudo-battlements of Greystone Towers; and between the turreted mansion and its formidable walls, ample grounds, adorned with shrubbery and trees, stretched spaciously in all directions. They all had the bareness of December now, but Helen could imagine that in the springtime they might soften the formality of the mansion a little, and give delicacy and colour to its heavy drabness.

As she continued to stand looking down at the estate, and wondering what it would be like to live in such a place, a girl with a golf bag over her arm and a young man similarly equipped at her side, came out of one of the many massive doorways, and after stopping for a minute on the steps, ran lightly down them, and disappeared behind a mass of shrubbery. She was not near enough for Helen to see her features but she gave an immediate impression of vivid beauty and flexible grace. Without seeing more, Helen was sure that this girl had no "babyish" characteristics like herself, that on the contrary her hair was thick and dark, and her eyes impudent and sparkling and her face glowing with the warm rich blood that burned beneath her white skin and transfigured it. She would not be afraid to go out and meet new people and do strange things. She would welcome the chance, and if no chance occurred of itself, she would create it.

Helen sighed, and turning away from the window, picked up the morning paper. She had scarcely glanced at it, so far, but she seemed to remember that there had been a picture, in the society section, of a girl very like the one she had just seen. The paper was still open at that section, for Mrs. Morton had been looking at it to make sure the announcement she had sent in had been properly printed. So Helen had no difficulty in locating the picture, and its

caption confirmed her impression: "Miss Veronique Alfieri, the granddaughter of Mrs. Eliphalet Endicott of Greystone Towers. Miss Alfieri, who is one of the leading débutantes of the season, is a countess in her own right, but rarely uses her title. She was presented by her grandmother at a dance the day before Thanksgiving."

The details which the picture revealed also confirmed Helen's own mental image. The photographer had been clever about catching the light in the girl's eyes, and her curly dark hair swung freely around her fresh face. She looked amazingly light-hearted. Her dress was revealing, with only narrow shoulder-straps over the arms, and a V-shaped bodice. She was slender, but her figure lacked the fashionable flatness, and in that respect at least Helen felt that she had an advantage. She was happy to be shaped like a slim boy, and she would have been chagrined as well as embarrassed if the lines of her breasts and hips had been accentuated, as Veronique Alfieri's were in this picture. All her own skirts were fluffy, and all her evening dresses had little puffed sleeves and round necklines, cut just below her collarbones. That was the sort of dress she really liked. She liked ruffles too, and small bows.

The picture fascinated her, at the same time that it repelled her. She went on looking at it, and thinking about the girl it represented. Her mother had referred to Mrs. Endicott's granddaughter as Veronica, but Helen saw that in the picture the name was given a French spelling, Veronique. Was the girl French? Her other name, Alfieri, sounded as if she might be Italian. And then there was the title! It all seemed to be very thrilling and very romantic. Probably Mrs. Endicott's own daughter had married a charming continental count. Helen wondered if the girl's father and mother were dead, which would be terribly sad, or if they were in Europe, on their own domain, which would probably be even more impressive than Greystone Towers. The paper did not mention them at all. But even if she were separated from her parents, and no matter for what reason, Helen did not see how Veronique Alfieri could possibly be lonely or sad. She was so beautiful and so assured that certainly she must be very happy too.

Helen also wondered if the young man who was going out to play golf was Veronique's "high particular." Of course, Veronique would not refer to him as a "high particular," she would call him her fiancé, if he really were. "High particular" was Bob's own favourite phrase, and once in a while Helen borrowed it. If Bob ever became engaged, he would go right on calling his girl his "high particular," no matter how important a person she was. Even if she were a girl like Veronique Alfieri. There was no reason why Bob should not become engaged to a girl like Veronique Alfieri. He was just as good as she was, every bit. Maybe he would convince her of that right away. Maybe he would fall in love with her right away, and

cut out the man who was playing golf with her. Maybe she would fall in love with Bob right away. Maybe——

“Hello! A penny for your thoughts!”

Helen started up guiltily, dropping the newspaper as she did so. She had not the least idea that Bob was back already, that it was so late. Now he was leaning over her, laughing. His teeth looked very white when he laughed, especially as his skin was so brown. He never lost his tan, all winter long. Fundamentally, there was a good deal of resemblance between him and his sister. But his hair was straight and sandy, while hers was soft and pale, and his blue eyes lacked the pellucid quality of hers. It was his teeth and his tan that made him seem handsomer than he really was, although he was far from bad looking in his own breezy way.

“You look as if I’d caught you stealing jam! What’s on your conscience? Come clean now.”

“I haven’t anything at all on my conscience. I’ve just been sitting here, since you left, looking out of the window and reading the paper. Is it time to get ready for lunch?”

“Just about. Feel more like facing it now, don’t you? That’s the girl.”

Helen picked up the paper and smoothed it out. Then she laid it down on the desk, folding it so that Veronique Alfieri’s picture would show. Instantly she saw her brother’s eye upon it, appraising it quickly.

“Yes,” she said happily. “I do feel a lot more like facing it now. I think you were right. I think it’s going to be fun.”

CHAPTER II

THE drive up to Greystone Towers started between the miniature turrets which adorned the gates and ended before the great griffins which guarded the porte-cochère. It had been built before the days of automobiles and was far too steep, too winding and too narrow for them to mount with ease. These same qualities made it difficult for Senator and Mrs. Morton to mount it. The Senator had always worked beyond his strength, and recently the strain of this had begun to tell on his heart. He was thankful for the steady support of Bob's hand under his elbow, but Bob noticed that although they were taking things easily, the old gent looked rather white around the gills, and it worried him.

In her home town, Mrs. Morton was brutally designated as a "fleshy woman." She herself referred to her figure as "matronly." As the Morton family walked up the driveway, their progress was constantly interrupted, both by the necessity of skipping from side to side to avoid being crushed by the conveyances of other guests, and by Mrs. Morton's need of stopping to catch her breath. It was a trying experience for her. But she had schooled herself in self-control, and never permitted her irritation, however greatly provoked, to become visible. Her smile was still static when she and Helen entered the gloomy library—temporarily converted into a ladies' cloakroom—at the right of the cavernous entrance hall, and surrendered their wraps to the middle-aged maid who was in charge.

The maid laid the wraps carefully down over the backs of the heavy leather furniture, and placed smaller objects, like scarves and gloves, on the tops of bookcases, between the unthumbed rows of classics bound in half-calf, and ponderous gilt-framed pictures of deer and other wild creatures, looking abnormally subdued and tame, which surmounted the shelves. Helen wondered if Mrs. Endicott had an especial fondness for deer, for there were several made of bronze in the room, besides the painted ones, and over the mantel there was a life-sized head which formed part of the oak carving. She had the fantastic notion that if Bob had been sent to take off his things in this room, instead of being dispatched to another apartment across the hallway, he would have insisted on draping his scarf over the horns of the carved deer.

Another guest who had entered just before them was still in the library, transferring a corsage bouquet of gardenias from the lapel of her straight coat to the shoulder of her grey crêpe dress, which, although beautifully cut, was quite without any other orna-

ment. Helen had noticed her alighting from her limousine, and had been struck both by the elegance of her bearing and the graciousness of her manner. Now the girl was amazed to see her mother bear beamingly down upon this lady, as if she knew her.

"Mrs. Windsor!" exclaimed the new senator's wife. "What a delightful coincidence! I have been hoping to meet you again, but I didn't dare believe it would be so soon. Don't tell me you can't remember me!"

"It's terribly stupid of me, but I'm afraid I don't. I have such a wretched memory."

"I am Mrs. Robert Morton, the wife of the new senator from Arkansas. I met you at a reception which Mrs. Clyde, the wife of our senior senator, gave for our Arkansas delegation during the Continental Congress. You were pouring tea for her that day. I had the great pleasure of talking to you for some minutes. It was in 1922. No, now that I think of it, it was in 1921."

"Why of course, Mrs. Morton! How nice to see you again! And is this pretty young girl your daughter?"

"Yes, my daughter Helen. My son Robert is here too. We're all here. Dear Mrs. Endicott is so hospitable, isn't she?"

"She certainly is. Shall we go into the drawing-room? No, indeed, Mrs. Morton, after you. Helen and I will bring up in the rear."

Mrs. Windsor motioned with a white hand, and Helen caught the gleam of a great star sapphire. Never, she thought, had she seen a lady as lovely as this one. Everything about her bespoke breeding as well as beauty, and the possession of a position so assured and wealth so long established that both were taken for granted with the utmost simplicity. How tactful and pleasant she had been about that forgotten meeting! She had contrived to give the impression that she had really been remiss and was very sorry for this, and thus to swell Mrs. Morton's sense of her own importance, instead of wounding her through rebuke. Feeling the white hand descending on her arm in a friendly fashion, Helen's own heart swelled with boundless gratitude and boundless admiration. Some day, she said to herself, she would be just like Mrs. Windsor, beautiful and accomplished and kind. She had found her pattern and meant to follow after it.

Senator Morton and Bob were waiting in the cavernous hallway; there was a brief pause for presentations. Mrs. Windsor, it appeared, had come all alone. Her husband, unfortunately, was not well that day—oh, nothing at all serious, or naturally she would not have left him. But it seemed wiser for him to rest, and Mrs. Endicott had been good enough to say she might come without him, that it would be easy enough to pick up an extra man. Would the Mortons let her go into the drawing-room with them, so that she would have company?

Again Helen sensed the quality of her charm. There was not a man or woman in the drawing-room who did not immediately greet Mrs. Windsor with warmth, and most of them called her Isabel, kissing her cheek or her hand according to their sex; she was surrounded on every side by the same sort of feeling which she had so quickly awakened in Helen. The Mortons' own entrance, on the other hand, was made infinitely easier because she was with them. They were complete strangers, and their progress around the circle of guests, somewhat stiffly drawn up beyond their hostess, would have been awkward and trying if Mrs. Windsor had not so delightfully broken the ice for them.

Mrs. Endicott's own salutation was brief. With the same lack of ceremony with which she had brought her telephone conversation to an end, when she had finished what she herself desired to say, she passed her guests along to her granddaughter, who was standing beside her, and whose acknowledgment of their presence was as nonchalant as the older woman's had been curt. Helen had only a general view of a very erect old lady, clad in lace-trimmed moire and wearing innumerable jewels, whose figure and hairdressing were both suggestive of an era so far bygone that she herself had seen it only through faded family photographs; then she was swiftly confronted with a girl whose red dress did not cover her knees, and whose uncorseted form and bobbed curls put her in the forefront of startling styles. The contrast was bewildering, like everything else in the fantastic picture; as she went on around the circle, hearing strange names murmured and trying to murmur them correctly in return, she became increasingly confused. There seemed to be all kinds of dignitaries present. She caught the words "Mr. Justice"—"Mr. Minister"—"Mr. Secretary" with no names whatsoever attached by which to catalogue them mentally for future reference. At last, thankful that she had actually come to the end of a seemingly endless chain, she looked around for a place where she might sit down quietly, somewhere near Mrs. Windsor, and try to disentangle her impressions.

In the middle of the room there was a circular seat covered with pink plush, and pierced in the centre by a funnel-shaped wooden support. In spite of its weird appearance, it looked comfortable, and it had the added merit of facing in all directions, although the innumerable pictures, covering every inch of wall space, and separately illuminated with shaded lights, did not make a restful background against which to survey the guests. It seemed to be the most promising thing that offered itself, however, and Helen managed to edge closer to Mrs. Windsor again and whisper to her.

"Could we sit down for a minute? On that pink plush seat?"

"We will, after lunch. I'm afraid we mustn't now. The French ambassador will be coming in directly, and we're supposed to stand at attention, more or less, while we wait for him."

"Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't know."

"Of course not. Nobody knows all those funny little things by intuition. They're terribly hard on newcomers. I haven't forgotten—I made any number of breaks at first. But I'm sure you'll learn, very quickly—— Has Captain Arnold been presented to you yet? Giles, this is Miss Helen Morton."

Helen had always thought the name of Giles had a rather harsh sound, and glancing timidly towards the man in front of her, she thought he had a rather harsh look. But when Isabel Windsor spoke to him, her voice made music and her manner evinced tenderness. It was evident that she felt no fear of this formidable person, but that she was fond of him, and that she took his friendliness towards herself and to others for granted. She seemed to do so with reason. The bitter expression about the man's mouth softened.

"I'm afraid I didn't arrest Miss Morton's gaze while she was being shepherded along," he said. "But I'm glad to have a second chance. Is this your first Washington party, Miss Morton? Well, don't judge them all by it. Some of them are actually very pleasant. Now Mrs. Windsor gives delightful parties. But these old gorgons don't show us any mercy when they get us in their grip. It serves us right for kowtowing to them, I suppose."

"Is Mrs. Endicott one of several gorgons?" Helen inquired, her curiosity getting the better of her timidity.

"Lord, yes. There's Mrs. Rutherford and Mrs. Burgess and Mrs. Hunter and three or four secondary ones. All widows, all rich, all dictatorial. They tell us what to do, and we do it. Every one of us, from the Vice-President down."

"I don't see why, if you don't want to. I don't see why you go to their houses if you don't like them."

"It isn't very sporting of us, is it? To eat their salt and then talk about them like that? You're right, Miss Morton. But you see we meet so many persons at their houses whom we do like. Now I like you immensely, for instance. And if I hadn't come here today, we mightn't have met. Are you going to the Swedish Legation this afternoon? There, you see—if I hadn't met you at Mrs. Endicott's luncheon I might have missed you for several days and think what a futile loss of time that would have represented."

"Giles, I'm afraid you're making a very bad impression on Miss Morton."

"I'll bet it's good by comparison with the impression anyone else has made on her. Except, of course, your lovely self, Isabel—— Honestly, now, don't you think our hostess is a grim old gorgon, Miss Morton?"

"Well——" began Helen, smiling in spite of herself.

"And that the much publicized Corsican countess is an out-and-out savage, unsuited for civilized society?"

"Oh, is she a *Corsican*?"

"She 'sho'ly am.' Her father was a sort of robber-baron, who got stabbed in the back according to the best operatic manner. But not soon enough, unfortunately, to keep him from making his wife's existence a prolonged foretaste of hell. He was a handsome devil, I'll say that for him—he could've had any girl he wanted in Washington, which is more than most of us can. His daughter looks just like him, too. But——"

"Giles, I've told you once already that you're making a very bad impression on Miss Morton. Stop spreading scandal."

"If I only had a drink I wouldn't be tempted to talk evil. I'd grow genial by leaps and bounds. Now old Rutherford's cellar is her great boast. It's all pre-war stock and she delights in pouring out the best vintages with a lavish hand. I'll say that for her. But then she always wants you to contribute to something afterwards. The Animal Rescue League or the Home for Wayward Girls or something. This old gorgon doesn't do that. I'd like her a lot better though if she'd let us have just one little drink."

"You forget, Giles. She may have some special reason for not wanting to serve it. There are such people."

He growled slightly and shook his head. "I don't forget anything, Isabel. But even if liquor is against her principles, or yours either for that matter, as a source of innocent merriment, it certainly would fill in the gaps in these horrible waits. Do you know I counted up once, and I found I'd spent fourteen years, all told, waiting for prominent persons to appear? Just a few hours at a time, of course, here and there. But the sum total is staggering."

"You won't have a chance to build that story up to fifteen today, Giles. Here are the Marceaus now."

A small birdlike little man who carried his head on one side, accompanied by a tall, austere-looking woman, had entered the drawing-room and advanced towards their hostess. For the first time, Mrs. Endicott unbent slightly. Her stiff pompadour seemed to quiver a little and her straight front to relax into human curves. For the first time, Veronique Alfieri drew herself up. Her wild curls assumed a momentary aspect of order and her slouch became a respectful inclination. The two dignitaries, having made just the proper pause, continued around the circle. They did not stop, perceptibly, again until they reached Isabel Windsor.

"Et où étais-tu, hier, chérie? Je t'attendais."

"Mille excuses. Je ne pouvais pas venir."

"Étienne va toujours mal?"

"Oui, toujours."

"Dommage. Et toi, Giles, mauvais sujet?"

"Toujours bien. Et à votre service, Excellence."

While the Ambassador spoke to Giles Arnold, his wife went on talking to Isabel Windsor, and Helen saw that her eyes softened,

too, like everyone else's while they spoke to Isabel. When she looked away, she held out her hand to Helen with a smile.

"Mrs. Windsor tells me that you're a new neighbour of mine," she said pleasantly, in excellent English. "And a very charming child. You and your mother must come in to see me on Friday. I am always at home on Fridays through December, for the convenience of the new officials. I shall look forward to welcoming you at the Embassy. Ah—Mr. Chief Justice—so you are acting as Mrs. Endicott's host today! What a pleasure to have you escort me to the dining-room!"

Helen had already noticed the grizzly, twinkling Chief Justice, although she had not definitely identified him as such. He was one of the men who had detained Isabel when she went around the circle, and Helen had heard him gently chiding Mrs. Windsor because she had not breakfasted with him for two Sundays now. Isabel had answered him lightly, calling him Uncle John; she had reminded him that it was not easy for her to leave her husband early in the morning when he was not well—it was only later in the day that she found it feasible to go out. The Chief Justice had accepted her explanation without much comment, but with the expressed hope that she might come to him "sometime within the next month instead." His remark helped Helen to begin her conversation with her own escort, whom she thought she identified as the young man who had been playing golf with Veronique earlier in the day.

"Does the Chief Justice have company to breakfast every Sunday morning? I overheard him saying something that sounded as if he did."

"Just about, I reckon. I know Mother goes to those breakfasts sometimes. I never have. The Chief Justice is very keen on good-looking widows, but he doesn't care so much for their sons."

"There seem to be a great many outstanding widows in Washington," went on Helen, drawing still further on items she had gleaned before lunch.

"'Queen, you've said a mouthful!' It's their happiest hunting ground—when they get to heaven, that'll be some comedown for them. My mother is Mrs. Hunter, the poorest and prettiest of the lot—I thought I heard Giles Arnold rambling on to you about them. I'm Welby, her only son and heir. We're not exactly wondering where our next meal is coming from. But we're Southerners. We haven't the gift of piling up rocks that the Yankees have. Now we own some mighty pleasant orchards down yonder in the Valley; but apples aren't in it with pills as a source of shekels. You ought to come to Winchester though, to see our blossom festival. That is something! How about it? We'll be making up a house-party for it now at Hunter's Green, in Berryville, right near there, and we'd be plenty glad if you'd say you'd

come. Of course, I hope you'll come before that, too. Say at Christmas. We always have a house full at Christmas."

"It's awfully kind of you. Of course I'd have to ask my mother."

"Oh, shucks! My mother's the best chaperon ever. Always has two or three beaux of her own on hand, to keep her mind off us. Beaux and booze and the best of both. That's her motto. Not bad either, is it?"

Helen made a somewhat noncommittal reply. Welby Hunter was a personable young man, but she had had a feeling from the beginning that he might very easily get out of hand, and what he told her about his mother did not serve to reassure her. For a moment she concentrated her gaze on the immense round table, fantastically adorned, in the centre, with a large old-fashioned lamp rising amidst puffs of crimson silk, which were surrounded, in turn, by large numbers of fancy silver spoons, which seemed to serve no special purpose, and which were tied with crimson satin bows. Then, tardily, she turned to the dark young man on her other side.

He had made no previous effort to talk to her, though luncheon had now progressed from mushroom soup to lobster Newburg, and from this to filet mignon. Apparently he had not been talking to the girl on his other side either, for her head was turned away from him, and she was rattling along as if her life depended on speaking at least a hundred words a minute, and punctuating her remarks with little shrieks of laughter. Between Helen, who was so hesitant, and this girl, who was so voluble, the dark young man sat in unembarrassed silence; and as Helen took her first good look at him, she saw that he was far more personable, even, than Welby Hunter. His profile was strong and clear-cut, his brows heavy above very black eyes. His hair was black and heavy, too, and extremely straight. His clear skin had extraordinary smoothness for a man's, and a golden tinge to it, subtly different from the tinge of her brother's tan, but just as pleasing. He was more formally dressed than any of the other men at the table, even the Ambassador and the Chief Justice, who, much to Helen's disappointment, did not personify the elegance she had expected to find in such dignitaries. This young man did. His linen was stiff and snowy, his morning-coat sleek and black, his tie pearl-coloured. He wore a tiepin, which surprised her slightly, and a massive ring on a noticeably well-groomed hand. Strangely enough, these ornaments seemed neither tasteless nor incongruous. They suited the exotic personality which the perfect tailoring neither concealed nor subdued.

"This is a very big party, isn't it?" Helen observed, for the sake of saying something, but without the slightest attempt at originality.

The dark young man bowed before he answered. "It is indeed

most large," he agreed courteously. "But it appears to me most enjoyable. I hope it so appears to you, Mees Morton."

He spoke slowly, carefully, and with a decided accent. Helen had never heard a young man speak so carefully and slowly before. But his accent did not annoy her; it attracted her. She went on with diminishing self-consciousness.

"Are you a stranger here, too?" she inquired, genuinely interested.

"I have now been in Washington since six months. But I am still most strange. I have not much been out in society."

"I don't blame you. I think it's frightening myself."

The dark young man smiled. "It is not that I have so much been frightened. It is that I have not so much been invited. It is that I am a Latin-American and not a European, you see."

"But I don't. I don't see why Latin-Americans shouldn't be invited just as much as Europeans. I should think they'd be invited more. Because, after all, we're *fellow* Americans, aren't we? The Latin-Americans and the ones in the United States, I mean. I should think it would be most important for all of us to get to know each other, to be good friends."

The dark young man smiled again. Helen noticed now that he had very nice teeth, as white as Bob's, that glistened, just as Bob's did, against his golden-brown skin. She was feeling more and more at ease every minute and having neglected the first part of her lunch, through fright, she began to attack her salad with appetite. She had never in her life made such a long speech at a party. But then she had never met anyone at a party who appealed to her so much.

"It is most kind of you to say that," he answered with gratitude. "I shall report what you have said to my Ambassador, if that would not be displeasing to you."

Helen could not instantly think of an answer which would reveal the glow of pride that his words aroused. He went on speaking to her as if the lack of response did not trouble him.

"I think today I was invited because some other gentleman could not come. Mr. Windsor perhaps. Very often he finds at the last minute that he is not well enough to attend parties. I have been invited before when he was indisposed. It was only this morning that Mrs. Endicott spoke to me over the telephone, and I think the party has been planned for some time. That is necessary when the French Ambassador is to be the guest of honour, or the Italian. They are the guests the most sought after in Washington. It is very natural."

"Why, Mrs. Endicott didn't invite us until this morning either!"

"Yes? But then you have only just arrived, no? You are Senator Morton's daughter, are you not? A United States Senator and his family—naturally Mrs. Endicott would be very pleased to add them

to her party. They are important people. She would make room for them most proudly. But with a young Mexican attaché it is different. He is not important. I assure you I was asked only because at the last minute Mr. Windsor was indisposed and could not come."

"I'm glad he couldn't. Somehow I don't believe I'd like him. It's just an idea. But I think she's the loveliest lady I ever saw, don't you?"

"She is very lovely. But no. Not quite."

Something in his tone made Helen blush. But she thought she must be mistaken. Surely he couldn't have meant—why, she had no style and no poise and no distinction—*nothing* that Isabel Windsor had. And yet— Suddenly she knew that she had not misinterpreted the inference, and this knowledge gave her such courage as she had never felt before. Instead of being tongue-tied with embarrassment, she found it easy to go on expressing what was in her mind.

"You mustn't say you're not important. You do seem important to me. Really you do. I think you're the most important man at the table. I thought so even before you spoke to me. I'd been looking at you."

She stopped, aghast at her temerity, and conscious that her blush had deepened until it flooded her whole face. She could not imagine what had come over her. She had never said anything like this to a young man before. But then she had never felt this way about a young man before. Or about anybody. It was an entirely new feeling. She was stabbed all over with small pinpricks of excitement, and a little forking pain was creeping through her besides. But strangely enough she did not mind the pricks and the pain. They thrilled her and uplifted her and gave her a sense of joy. She wanted them to keep on coming, harder and faster, until they really did hurt. She glanced down, because she knew that the dark young man was looking her very straight in the face by now, and she did not feel she could meet his eyes—just yet. So she directed her gaze towards his hands instead. But when she saw these, she could think of nothing but how much she would like to touch them, to find out whether they were really as firm and as gentle as they looked. Then she decided that she had better meet his eyes after all, and when she did that she could not think about anything or speak either, and her wish about the hurt came true.

"I am not important. But I am at your feet, señorita," she heard him saying. And he spoke so tenderly that tears came to her eyes, for the second time that day. But this time they were happy tears.

It was only long afterwards that she realized she had fallen in love with him before she even knew his name.

CHAPTER III

HELEN had seen that, as she hoped, Bob was taking Veronique Alfieri in to luncheon; but they had been seated in such a way at the curve of the great circular table that the immense lamp and the crimson puffings had hidden them from her. At first she had felt sorry that she could not watch her brother's face and gauge the extent of his enjoyment. Then she became so preoccupied with her own sudden sensation of joy that she forgot all about it. It was not until she was going out of the dining-room, at Welby Hunter's side, that she saw him again, and realized that he and Veronique were deliberately waiting for her. The young Mexican had been detained, almost forcibly, by the voluble young lady who had so completely ignored him during luncheon, but who seized upon him at the end of it with such determination that only a curt break could have detached him from her.

"I'm afraid you had a dull time with that Dago," remarked Veronique. "We never had him here before, but Stephen Windsor left us high and dry at the last moment, as usual, and we simply couldn't get anybody else to fill in. About a dozen different people are having luncheons today. I don't see why anyone ever counts on Stephen in the first place. But it's better to have him stay home than to come so drunk that he goes slobbering around on other guests' shoulders, and telling smutty stories that are simply beyond the pale. There's another man about town whose habits are similar to Stephen's who does exactly that."

Veronique had lost her look of insolence. Helen knew that the general tenor of her remarks was meant to be cordial, but as the younger girl listened to them she felt all the acute discomfiture which she had so recently and so briefly escaped overwhelming her again. Only some latent spark of self-assertion enabled her to answer adequately.

"It's kind of you to be concerned. I didn't have a dull time though. I liked the Mexican boy very much. But I never heard his name. Will you tell me what it is?"

"Alfredo Terraza. At least there's a lot more to it, but that's enough for practical purposes. Well, I'm glad he wasn't so bad, but Granny oughtn't to have so many mutts at her parties. You can have one or two, if you've got a lot of other people, but she has too many in proportion to the others that are really hot. Anyway, I don't believe the Dago will bother you any more. I see that Eva Irwin has clamped her claws right into him. And I was going to suggest that you and Welby should come upstairs with me. Your

brother says he'd like to. Of course I've got to stay down here until the canary and the hawk take their august leave, but they'll do that on the stroke of three. Then we can play mah jongg or something until it's time to start for the Swedish Legation. I've got plenty of gin. Welby keeps me supplied. I'm sure he'll help you out, too, any time you run short or don't know where else to turn."

"Thank you. I don't drink, but I'd like to play mah jongg until it's time for you to start for the next party. Bob and I aren't invited to the Swedish Legation."

"Oh, that doesn't make any difference! Half the other people who'll be there haven't been invited either. You and Bob can go along with Welby and me. I think Granny's going out with some crony of her own—first to the concert, and then to three or four teas. She'll turn up at the Swedes' sooner or later, but I don't know just when— How quaint of you not to drink! Don't you ever really? I think she's cute, don't you, Welby? You've asked her to your house-party, haven't you? Why don't you take her and Bob upstairs right now? You can slink away without being seen, and I'll tell Senator and Mrs. Morton I'm taking charge of their children. And I'll be along myself as soon as I can."

Helen had meant to go and sit down on the pink plush seat where she had been deterred from establishing herself before luncheon. She was certain that, given time, Alfredo Terraza would manage to extricate himself from the grasp of the voluble young lady, and rejoin her. Besides, she wanted to talk to Mrs. Windsor again, and Mrs. Windsor had promised that after lunch a chance for this would be created. But her new-found powers of self-assertion, though strong enough to defend the lonely young Mexican and to express her own distaste for bootleg liquor, were not sufficiently powerful to resist the pressure that was sweeping her along towards the dark carved stairway. Welby Hunter was on one side of her and her brother on the other. Almost before she knew it, she was in the upper hallway, following Welby's lead towards the end of it, where it widened into a sunny lounge, far less ponderously furnished than the overloaded rooms below. A pingpong table occupied one side of it, and several smaller tables were already arranged for cards and mah jongg, while easy-chairs, made of wicker and upholstered in chintz, were drawn up beside them.

This was evidently Veronique's own domain. Indeed, an open door led from it to a bedroom bright with cerise taffeta, which covered the bed and the dressing-table and hung from the windows in frilly folds. Selecting a key from a ring, Welby went into this bedroom and unlocked the cupboard door. Then he returned to the lounge with a full equipment of glasses, bottles, siphon and shaker.

"Sure you won't change your mind?" he asked Helen, pouring out liberal potions for Bob and himself. "It's absolutely safe. My mother knows her booze, like I told you, and this is out of her own

stock. She doesn't fool around with second-grade bootleggers. Well, here's looking at you, anyhow. And don't forget we have to hide all this quick if we hear anyone coming. We'd never darken the door again if the old dragon was on to us. What shall we play till Ronnie gets here? Mah jongg or rummy?"

They decided on rummy, with which both Bob and Helen were more familiar than they were with mah jongg, and began to play. It was not long before Veronique joined them. She gave tongue to candid relief at her escape from the stodgy atmosphere of her grandmother's luncheon, with a few more remarks about mutts, and declining co-operation from her two male guests, poured out a stiff drink for herself, saying that no one else could mix liquor to suit her. But though she sipped away at it while she played, she did not drink it fast or greedily, and it was evident that her interest in cards was far more intense than her taste for alcohol. She played recklessly but brilliantly, taking enormous chances and making enormous winnings. At the end of two hours she was hundreds of points ahead.

"There!" she exclaimed, as the clock struck five. "That ought to keep me going for a while. Is your family stingy to you, Helen, about an allowance, the way Granny is to me? I hope not, because I've won a lot of money from you. Let's see—I'm dreadful at adding. You take the score, Welby."

"But I didn't know——" Helen began, again aghast. Then she felt Bob kicking her under the table, and stopped abruptly.

"I'm the family banker," he said breezily. "How much does it come to, Hunter? Well, the lady did make a haul, didn't she? More power to her! But I guess I'll have another drink on that!"

He drained his glass, set it down and reached into his pocket for his wallet. When he drew it out it was revealed bulging with crisp bills, and Helen knew that these must represent his entire supply of cash for his father's current expenses and his own. But he counted out the clean notes quickly, handed them to Veronique with a laugh, and put the flattened billfold jauntily back into his pocket.

"What's this other party I heard about?" he inquired. "The Swedish Legation? That doesn't sound so hot to me. But if you say so, Ronnie, I guess it must be O.K." He was calling her Ronnie already, the way Welby did, not stumbling, as Helen was, over any uncertainty as to whether it should be Veronique or Veronica. "Have you got a bus of your own? Or how do we go?"

"Oh, I've got a roadster. I can't stand Granny's old hearse, and she did loosen up for once. *Will* I be glad though when I'm twenty-one and have my own money—— There's a rumble seat, you and Welby can ride in that, Helen. Maybe we'd better clean up this mess before we go, unless you boys want one more drink. There's not much point in it though—we can have all we want at the Lega-

tion, of course, not bootleg either. Come on into my room and powder your nose, Helen. We'll meet the boys downstairs."

It was cold in the rumble seat and blowy. Helen was sure her nose would be red before she reached the party, and her hair badly rumbled. She was troubled again, because she liked to be tidy in her dress, and still more troubled because Welby Hunter had put his arm around her, and she could not withdraw from him without making a scene. She thought he must have had a little too much to drink, because he did not pay the slightest attention to anything she said to him, but went rattling on, laughing and telling her what a swell girl she was, and pulling her closer to him. She kept hoping that Bob would look around and size up the situation and rescue her from it; but Bob, while perfectly sober, was also laughing and rattling on. Though he did not have his arm around Veronique Alfieri, Helen knew that it would be only a matter of time before he did, and meanwhile he was not taking his eyes off her. She drove extremely well, revealing the same brilliance and dispatch with which she played cards and weaving her way skilfully through the thickening traffic. It was still broad daylight, and as they swung around Sheridan Circle, Helen could see children at the base of the bronze statue, and itinerant vendors, with balloons on long strings and pushcarts filled with flowers, sauntering up and down the outer rim of the grass plot. She longed to jump out of the roadster, to escape from her companions and sit quietly in the sunshine, watching the children at play, buying a few flowers and holding them in her lap. But the roadster, having skimmed the circle, shot up Massachusetts Avenue and without a jar or a jolt came to a smooth stop in front of a long awning.

"Hello, William," Veronique called out, springing lightly down from her seat. "Get one of those lazy chauffeurs that are hanging around to park my car for me, won't you?" Helen saw that her hostess was addressing an aged coloured man, clad in green livery trimmed with silver buttons, who held a megaphone in his hand and grinned broadly while Veronique was talking to him. "'Deed I will, Miss Veronique," he said proudly. "Jes' you go right in to the party and leave you' cyar to me." Then, as a group of dignitaries appeared at the entrance of the awning, coming from the house, he picked up his megaphone and began to call. "Cuba's cyar! Senator Hyde's cyar! Mis' Burgess' cyar! Cuba! Where you done gone?"

The departing guests, greeting Veronique cordially, and nodding in a general vague way at her companions, seemed to be enjoying the old negro's summons immensely. "It wouldn't be possible to have a real party in Washington without William, would it?" Helen heard one of the ladies, who was strikingly dressed in mauve, saying to the man who was with her. "I'm sure I don't know what

will happen when he dies. Probably there won't be any more real parties."

"Is William a very famous character?" Helen inquired as they went on up the red carpet.

"Goodness yes! You heard what Gloria Woodbridge said just now—there couldn't be a real party without him. (Hello, Madge! Hello, Phil—where are you running off to?) He used to be someone's coachman, and when carriages went out of fashion he thought up this plan of calling cars and opening doors. (Well, if it isn't pretty Pris at last! Where've you been keeping yourself, Pris? I suspect a heavy beau down in the hunt country!) He must've made lots of money. Everyone knows him and hires him and in bad weather tips him besides. (Hold on there, Jim! What are you trying to do, knock me down?) Gosh, this is a mob, isn't it? Do you want to go to the dressing-room and get smoothed down a little? I didn't know there was so much wind when I suggested the rumble seat—— Or shall we go straight on upstairs?"

Veronique had not exaggerated in designating the assembly as a mob. It was almost impossible to move in any direction. The door to the dressing-room was so solidly blocked, that though she felt even more dishevelled than she had feared, Helen gave up the effort to reach it. The stairway was packed, too, and progress in either direction was almost impossible; to advance a step, by wriggling or pushing, was nothing short of a triumph. Veronique did not seem to mind the struggle in the least, and neither did most of the others who were engaged in it; apparently it was an everyday occurrence for them, which they took in their stride, without surprise or suffering. But Helen was completely exhausted by the time she had battled her way to the entrance of the drawing-room, where a handsome blonde woman, without expression in her face or imagination in her dress, stood giving a limp hand to the battered visitors who were presented to her by a manservant whom Helen recognized as one of the same who had helped serve Mrs. Endicott's luncheon a few hours earlier.

"So very pleased. So happy to see you. So nice of you to come," the blonde woman kept saying. Her voice, like her face, was expressionless, and her hand, limp though it seemed, was adroit at propelling people along with the least possible delay. The drawing-room into which they perforce moved was as crowded as the stairway, and much more noisy. On the stairway, as under the awning, guests were giving each other only brief disjointed greetings. Here they were attempting some sort of conversation, which was carried on mostly in screams and roars, because the general din made a normal tone of voice completely inaudible. Even the most dignified old ladies were bellowing at each other. Mrs. Endicott came in, as Ronnie had predicted, the "crony" who was with her revealed as a dowager even more stately and substantial than her-

self. This matron, to whom Helen was eventually presented, proved to be Mrs. Rutherford, one of the other "gorgons" whom Giles had graphically described to the girl, and presently Mrs. Burgess, the third member of the great triumvirate, joined them also. Mrs. Rutherford was clad entirely in purple, with six large plumes waving above a hat of gigantic width, which her fellow-guests had difficulty in avoiding, considering both the crush and the insistence with which she drew them to her to solicit their sympathy for stray dogs and fallen girls. Her mouth and her manner were both determined, and once a victim who had set her hat askew paused to apologize he was lost; she did not relax her grip upon him until he had promised to make a cash contribution or at least attend a benefit. Mrs. Burgess was still more regally clad, for she was wrapped in an ermine coat, slightly yellowed by age, which she had declined to leave in the dressing-room because she had heard of several guests at private parties whose wraps had recently been stolen. The voice in which she said this was sufficiently resounding to be heard above the din, and the glances which she cast around her were hostile and accusing though they did not linger long on any one person. Helen began to worry because she had left her own simple little reefer downstairs.

The dining-room was the most crowded of all. A long table, laden with elaborate food, ran down the centre of it, and from this the guests were snatching up sandwiches and cakes, slashing at decorated meats, and scooping up salads with a rapacity that suggested they had not had anything to eat for a long time and did not know when they might have any more. Comparatively few, however, were clustering around the tea-kettle which stood at one end, or the coffee-urn which stood at the other end of the great groaning table. Instead, they nearly all pressed towards the smaller tables which stood in the corners, from each one of which drinks of different sorts were being dispensed. Waiters with desperate faces were trying to make a passageway for themselves and the trays, variously laden with champagne, cocktails, and highballs, which they were carrying. Others, equally harassed of aspect, were standing entrenched behind the little tables, trying with all their might to keep abreast of the demands which were made upon them there.

The neglected tea and coffee were not being served by waiters, but by ladies who were alternately pouring and engaging their occasional "customers" in sprightly conversation; Helen, who had been separated from the rest of her party in the crush, was delighted to see that one of these ladies was Mrs. Windsor.

"So you did come after all?" Isabel asked, as Helen contrived to wedge her way to her side. "I'm glad to see you again."

"Yes—— Veronique said it didn't matter whether I was invited or not, and I thought it would be exciting to go to a real Legation.

I've never seen one before. But now that I'm here I'm rather sorry I came. You see, I don't like noise or crowds very much."

"Giles Arnold would enjoy hearing you say that. He told me, directly after he met you, that you were a girl after his own heart, and now you've proven it by your own words. He hates noise and crowds, too, though he can't admit it, and lives in the midst of them most of the time. He's just back from the Orient, which is a tumultuous part of the world these days. He was a Squadron Commander, and destroyer duty is hectic at best. Now he's the President's Naval aide, and no one could call the White House quiet in this administration! You wouldn't care to leave here after a few minutes, would you, and go to Giles' own house? It's very attractive, and he'll give you some real China tea that he imports himself, or anything else, of course, if you'd rather have it. I heard him asking that charming Mexican to drop in for a drink, so you'd have a nice young man to talk to, and wouldn't be dependent on Giles and me for company. My time will be up at this table in a minute now, and when it is I'm going to make good my escape."

Helen's heart missed a beat. She hoped her gladness did not show too much as she said gratefully, "You know I'd love to come with you. But Veronique won't think I'm rude, will she, if I run away?"

"My dear child, I see you don't know these Washington debutantes. I'm sure they don't know the meaning of the word rude—if they did, they wouldn't embody it so consistently. We'll tell William, as we go out, to say that you've left with me. It would be hopeless to try to find anyone you didn't just happen on in this jam."

"Oh, can William do that too?"

"Yes, indeed. William can do almost anything."

He seemed to justify Mrs. Windsor's confidence, for he located her car immediately, and helped her into it with the proud air of one who was privileged to serve a princess. Mrs. Windsor leaned back and picked up the speaking-tube.

"We're going to Captain Arnold's, André."

Helen saw the chauffeur incline his head, respectfully and intelligently, as he swung the car around. Apparently it was not necessary to tell him where Captain Arnold lived. They did not have far to go, and Isabel did not speak at all while they were on their way. Helen had the impression that Mrs. Windsor was very tired and that she needed to withdraw into herself for a little while. It was a feeling which the girl could understand easily, because she shared it, and she made no effort to break the silence. However, when a door opened before they had time to ring, at the house before which they drew up, Isabel emerged from her reverie and greeted the waiting manservant with characteristic kindness.

"Good-afternoon, Whipple. I think Captain Arnold is expecting us."

"Yes, madam. He is already in the drawing-room. Thank you, madam."

For the third time that day Helen found herself in utterly strange surroundings. She had never before been in a house like Giles Arnold's, where the elegance was restrained and the colours subdued; but she felt its distinction and its repose without being able to analyse them. After the ponderous bad taste of Greystone Towers and the deafening din of the Swedish Legation, the soft lighting, the neutral carpets, and the pale cream walls were all soothing in themselves, and they all seemed to harmonize with the essential tranquillity. In the drawing-room the air was warm, but it was delightfully fresh; clear glass vases filled with spring flowers were scattered about, and a bright fire was burning beneath a white mantel. On a low table that stood in front of this, between two loveseats covered in old brocade, a tea service was set, with a plate of cucumber sandwiches and another of sponge drops placed beside the fragile cups. The kettle was purring, and steam came from it in a cheerful cloud. On a side-table were several decanters, an ice-bucket, tall silver goblets, and cigarettes in a silver bound glass box. But so far evidently only the cigarettes had been sampled. Giles Arnold and Alfredo Terraza were standing in front of a Chinese print, which they had apparently been discussing, and both were smoking. Otherwise the room had the untouched look of a place which had been skilfully and thoughtfully made ready for someone who had not yet entered it.

"So you came!" Giles Arnold said cordially. The words were almost the same that Isabel Windsor had spoken to the girl half an hour earlier, and at the moment Helen assumed that these were addressed to her also, though afterwards she was not so sure. It was natural that Giles Arnold should say something of the sort to her, and less logical that he should do so as far as Isabel was concerned. Yet Helen knew, almost instantly, that it was only Isabel whom he really wanted to see, and that he had not felt certain beforehand of her coming. "I'm going to ask Mrs. Windsor to pour tea for us," he went on. "Like everyone else, I feel my party wouldn't be complete unless she did, and unfortunately I haven't a hostess of my own. You like tea, don't you, Miss Morton? Because if you don't——"

"Thank you. I'd ever so much rather have tea."

Isabel Windsor was already pouring it out, with a practised hand. She had taken her place on one of the loveseats as if she were at ease and at home there, and Helen sat down on the other, facing her. Giles Arnold passed the sandwiches and the sponge drops himself; the manservant who had opened the door did not come in at all until they had finished, when he removed everything so deftly that Helen was hardly aware that he was doing it until it was done. Alfredo drank his tea standing; he did not sit down until his host did; then both men drew up chairs near the loveseats and lighted

fresh cigarettes. There was nothing remarkable about the conversation that followed. Giles Arnold asked Isabel Windsor what she had been reading lately, and when she told him they discussed the relative merits of several books. Alfredo Terraza asked Helen whether she had been as yet to one of the concerts at the Pan-American Union, and when she said she had not he explained the characteristics of these concerts to her. It was all as simple and unexciting as that. But suddenly Isabel glanced down at the tiny diamond wrist-watch she was wearing and gave an exclamation of dismay.

"Twenty after seven! I had no idea it was so late! I must fly! Señor Terraza, would it molest you to take Miss Morton home in your car? I live in the opposite direction."

"I shall be greatly honoured. If Miss Morton will be so good as to permit me."

"Of course she will. This is Washington, you know, not Mexico."

"I know, señora. But I am greatly honoured all the same, and most sensible of the confidence you place in me."

He spoke very soberly. Helen could not understand why he should, or why he should look so grave as he bent over Isabel's hand. But she was too happy over the turn things had taken to puzzle over any phase of them.

"I've had a lovely time," she said gratefully to Giles Arnold. "I never knew before it could be such fun, just to drink tea and talk about books and things."

"Then I hope you'll come again—soon and often. There's always tea at this hour, unless I'm on duty at the White House, and sometimes I can persuade Mrs. Windsor to pour it for me, when she isn't doing so at at least six other places. I hope Señor Terraza is going to come again too. I find we have a great mutual interest in Chinese prints— Oh, Isabel—can't you wait just one more minute after all? I'm sending Whipple to the library for that volume of verse you wanted."

Helen entered the lobby of the Majestic as if she had been walking on air. Her brief ride home, conversationally speaking, had been as unremarkable as the conversation around Giles Arnold's tea-table; and Alfredo Terraza had declined courteously, but firmly, to follow her suggestion of coming in for Sunday supper. But though she did not know what prompted his refusal, she did know that it was regretful. She believed him when he said he would not fail to come in, the following Thursday, to pay his respects to her mother, though just why he said Thursday was not clear to her either. But she knew that he liked her, at least a little. She thought he liked her very much. She hoped so, because she knew so well by now that there was no limit to the way she liked him.

"Excuse me. You're Miss Helen Morton, aren't you? Would you mind if I stopped you just a minute?"

Helen was very much startled. She had barely noticed the thin,

red-haired girl, seated, with an air of expectancy, on the first sofa in the long lobby. Now the girl had risen and had come rapidly up to her. She would have been a rather shabby-looking girl if she had not worn her cheap threadbare clothes with such smartness, and she would have been a rather plain-looking girl if her eyes had not snapped so and if her whole being had not seemed so electric. As it was, she galvanized Helen into immediate attention.

"Why no, of course not. But I'm afraid——"

"My name's Zoe Wing. I do a column. It's in a little syndicate I started myself, just by going around to see the editors of a few hick papers. None of the men on the big ones will listen to me—yet. I thought maybe you could tell me something about your first impressions of Washington. The parties you've been to or anything like that."

"I'd be glad to help you if I could. But I wouldn't know what you'd be interested in. I wouldn't know what you'd want to hear."

"Just anything. I can make copy out of anything you tell me. Didn't old Endicott have a luncheon today? Didn't you go to it?"

"Why yes. But——"

"Well, who else was there? Skip the Frenchies, I know about them. I know damned well you didn't have anything to drink either, but that story's been done to death already. What did you have to eat? What did that young hellcat Alfieri have on? Enough to cover her? Do you think she's going to marry that sap of a Hunter? God, have you seen his mother? Well, wait until you do, you'll know why Alfieri's hedging. He's the original son of a so-and-so all right, and I don't mean maybe."

"Miss Wing, I—— Would you mind excusing me? I'm a little late getting in, and I think perhaps some other time——"

"Listen, loveliness. I'm sorry I frightened you. But you mustn't mind the way I talk. It's just a habit. It doesn't mean a damn thing. I'm not half so bad as you think I am. In fact I'm a hell of a lot better than most of the sassiety girls you've met today."

Helen had a terrible feeling that what Zoe Wing said might be true. Except for Isabel Windsor, there was not a single woman who roused her wholehearted and instinctive admiration. But the profane young journalist shocked her profoundly. She made a second attempt at escape.

"I'm afraid there isn't a thing I could say. You know about the guests of honour at the party already. I don't know myself who most of the others were. You see, it's all very strange to me still, and I'm not good at names or faces or anything. There was a party at the Swedish Legation I went to besides, but I suppose you know all about that."

"I know damned little about it. If these dowagers and diplomats would let us into their houses once in a while, or at least talk to us over the telephone, we wouldn't have to go snooping around like

this. But they act like they thought we must be vermin or skunks or something. Swine, that's what one of them called us. 'All right, let the swine in!' she said after someone finally convinced her that she couldn't get any publicity for some damned benefit she was running unless she did let us in. But she treated us like swine all the time we were in her house, up to feeding us swill. I hope she rots in hell. Some day a dame'll come along with the idea that it might be a good plan to give the press a break if you want a good press. But so far not one of these hellions has had a glimmer that that's the damned truth."

Something about the girl's vehemence was arresting. Helen, who had been poised for flight, looked at her with reluctant fascination. Zoe Wing, seizing instantly upon her hesitation, went rapidly on.

"Listen, loveliness," she said a second time. "You don't mind if I call you loveliness, do you? Because you are lovely—— Well, my job means a lot to me. I always wanted to work on paper, ever since I can remember, and I've got a start now. I'm bound to succeed. Nothing scares me and nothing stops me. I've come all the way from the Kentucky mountains already and I'm going places in a big way before I get through. But it burns me up when I see there isn't anyone in this damned town who's willing to give a newspaper gal a break, and when I get burnt up, I swear, that's all there is to it."

At the further end of the lobby, the elevator door slid open with a faint metallic sound. Helen saw Bob get out and saunter slowly in the direction of the news-stand. Most of the evening papers had been sold out, but the pretty girl, who had been off during the middle of the day, was back on duty again. Bob had thought that it might fill in an evening that seemed to stretch out rather emptily ahead of him if he could spend an hour or so with her. But something impelled him to look in the opposite direction first, and when he did so, he saw his sister standing near the doorway, talking to a strange girl with the reddest hair that he had ever seen, and a queer, upward tilt to her head. Instead of continuing on his way to the news-stand, he sauntered the length of the lobby.

"Hello there," he said. There was nothing to indicate, exactly, that Helen was in a jam; yet somehow he had the feeling she might be. She would never be a match for a redheaded dame who held her head like that.

But somehow it worked out all right after all. Helen hadn't quite got the redheaded dame's number—he didn't get it himself straight off for that matter; but she wasn't upset by her after all. In fact, she seemed to have taken a liking to her. He took a liking to her too. Presently they all went up in the elevator together, and rustled around in the refrigerator for some supper. And while they were eating it, in the kitchen, he and Helen told this redhead what they had been doing that day. At least they told her part of it. He

did not tell her, for some reason, about the girl at the news-stand; and Helen did not tell her—or him either until later—what she had done after she had left the Swedish Legation.

He saw the red-headed dame home. She said he did not need to, that she was used to doing the town on her own and all that. She swore when she said it, to make her statement more emphatic. But he got a kick out of seeing her home, although she lived 'way over in the Southeast and he did not get back to the Majestic till all hours. Helen's light was still on and her door was ajar and he went in. Very often she left her light on and her door open so that he could come in the last thing at night and have a cosy chat with her. It was an especially cosy chat this time.

"You liked Zoe Wing, didn't you, Bob?"

"You bet. She's a live wire."

"Do you like her better than Veronique Alfieri?"

"I dunno. She's a live wire, too. I like 'em both. I don't have to choose, do I?"

"No-o. But a Corsican countess sounds more thrilling than a Kentucky mountain girl, doesn't she?"

"Yeah. But you can't always tell by the sound. And when Zoe Wing gets to talking, she sounds thrilling, too. That girl certainly has a gift of gab. She asked me in for a drink. She's got a one-room-kitchenette apartment she calls her tenement. The drink was pretty poor, but the talk was simply swell. I found out that Zoe worked her way through High School taking care of kids and through Normal School washing dishes. She sold magazines and did typewriting on the side while she took a course of journalism at a good college. I'll say this for her, she's got guts. I don't know whether Ronnie has or not. And Ronnie certainly lives high, wide and handsome. It'd cost a lot to keep up with her."

"That reminds me, Bob. How could you spare all that money you and I lost today at rummy? Wasn't that Father's expense money?"

"Part of it. But I can make that up all right. Don't you worry about it. Suppose you give an account of your own self now. You made a pretty swift getaway from the Legation. Where did you go?"

"I went to tea at Captain Arnold's house with Mrs. Windsor."

"Just the two of you? Was it any fun?"

"Yes. It was lots of fun. I don't know what made it fun, but it was. It was *nice*. The Mexican boy who was at the luncheon was there. The one Veronique called a Dago. He's nice, too."

"Rats! He couldn't be."

"But he is. So is Giles Arnold. And Mrs. Windsor is simply lovely."

"Got quite a crush on her, haven't you?"

"Oh, Bob, I'd rather be like her than anyone I know. I think she's simply perfect."

"I doubt it. Not so many are. Well, good night, kid. Tomorrow is another day."

Bob closed the door, quietly for him, as he went out. He knew his father needed his sleep and he did not want to disturb him. Helen put out her light and turned over on her pillow. Her last thoughts, before she fell asleep, were about Isabel Windsor. (Before that she had been thinking about Alfredo Terraza. But as long as she thought about him she did not get sleepy.) They were very happy thoughts, undisturbed by any intuition as to how Isabel herself had spent the evening.

For Isabel had been saying, wretchedly and hopelessly, over and over again, "Giles dear, I can't. Don't keep on asking me. Don't torture us both this way. I'd give my life if I only could. But I can't—I can't—I can't!"

PART II

CHAPTER IV

HELEN MORTON looked very lovely, on the day of her *début*, as she stood, at her parents' side, in front of a great rack filled with flowers, greeting their multitudinous guests as these filed past. She wore a wreath of rosebuds and forget-me-nots on her fair fine hair and carried an old-fashioned bouquet of the same flowers, surrounded with a paper frill. Her pale blue dress had a pink girdle, and the clusters of rosebuds and forget-me-nots on the full skirt and the puffed sleeves were caught up with little pink bows. It was the type of dress she had always preferred, and yet it was very different from those she had worn in Mortonville. There was a subtle quality to its simplicity. Isabel Windsor had brought it back, among her own Paris importations, when she returned from Europe in the fall, and had given it to Helen. It did credit to the designer no less than to the *débutante*.

The dress and the forget-me-nots matched Helen's eyes, and the girdle and the bows and the rosebuds matched her cheeks. Bob spoke of this to her first, and later, several other persons did so, too. She looked very young and very sweet in her Paris finery, but she did not look insipid or shy. She looked happy and confident. She was not shrinking or supersensitive any more. She had learned to enjoy herself in Washington.

This was partly because her *début* was not so precipitate as her mother had originally desired to have it. She had had ten months in which to find herself, and Mrs. Morton herself had been responsible for the delay. That lady's first spring had quickly become so complicated that it had automatically brought about a postponement of the moment when Helen's engagement should infringe upon Mrs. Morton's, and when the limelight should shift from mother to daughter. Mrs. Morton's primary preoccupation had been with the Vice-Presidency of N.S.D.A.R., an office on which she had long set her heart, and for which her candidacy had been proclaimed before she came to Washington. Unfortunately, the first picture released of her, after her ambition had taken definite form, proved disappointing. It revealed her in a Colonial costume, which was robbed of its air of authenticity because of the glittering glasses which made two round moons on her face below her powdered wig, and which were attached to her fichu by a gold pin at the end of a dangling chain. Its picturesqueness suffered

still further because of what her son brutally called her "pound-age"; in hoop skirts and tight-fitting bodice, she appeared double her normal substantial size. However, the second and "official" photograph, showing her in the slate-grey afternoon dress, was more successful, and the propitious appearance of this coincided with the dispatch of a neatly engraved card, which was mailed broadcast among the membership of the Society on her husband's franking privilege, and which set forth her qualifications for high office without any abbreviation.

After her arrival in Washington, Mrs. Morton's efforts took a more intensive form of persuasive campaigning, and at the time of the Continental Congress, late in April, they came to a culmination. She bought countless complete outfits, so that she would never run the risk of being seen by her fellow patriots twice in the same dress, wrap or hat, closing her consciousness to the thought of the bills thus recklessly piled up. She overcame her aversion to early rising in order to be on hand for the function with which each day began; a mammoth breakfast at one of the most fashionable hotels, proffered first by one state delegation and then by another. She went doggedly on to huge luncheons, similar in character to the breakfasts, which always followed the morning session of the Congress. A round of teas followed, and in their wake came several "banquets." There were so many state delegations that inevitably several of them gave banquets on the same night, and candidates for exalted office were expected to put in an appearance at every one of them; otherwise there were murmured charges of "favouritism" or "slights." Often Mrs. Morton ate three fruit cups, and nothing else, in the course of the same evening, because in her effort to avoid favouritism and slights, she happened to arrive at that number of banquets when this particular course was being served. On other evenings, she ate nothing but breasts of chicken with green peas, or Alaska pudding, for the same reason. All food became distasteful to her; yet she endeavoured to eat more and more, so that she could keep up her over-taxed strength.

Her mad rush was further complicated in countless ways. There was the necessity of maintaining a catlike watch for opportunities to corner breathless delegates, and whisper in their inattentive ears; there was the inconvenience of rushing home to change her dress repeatedly, and the burden of properly attaching and displaying the flowers which she carried and wore. There was always at least one sheaf of roses over her arm when she swept forth apparalled for the evening; there were always at least two bouquets of orchids pinned amidst her badges, and usually three or four, and on the great night of her nomination, two chairs, placed at either side of her on the platform, did not suffice to hold the heaped bouquets under which they were concealed. Still she could,

not control her apprehension lest some other candidate might make a braver showing; and these fears haunted her so, that at last she gave tongue to them, in one of the brief periods when her family caught sight of her.

They all met, strangely enough, at the door of their apartment. Senator Morton had been detained on the Hill by a private conference about ways and means to advance the cause of agricultural relief; Bob and Helen had been to a party in Chevy Chase Club. It was Bob who suggested that they should have a nightcap together before they turned in.

"My son, you know that I never drink anything with alcoholic content. Though in this case it might be considered medicinal. I am completely exhausted, and greatly disillusioned. I should never have believed that my opponents in this contest would've descended to such low, vile methods. I believe that the very ballot boxes are unsafe in their hands."

"Of course this liquor is medicinal," Bob said soothingly, mixing the drinks in a practised way. He had accepted with alacrity Welby Hunter's offer to keep him supplied with bootleg beverages, and now had two well-filled lockers, one at the Majestic Apartments, and one at the Senate Office Building. "Dad needs medicine, too. He looks pretty well done in himself."

"Yes, I am tired," the Senator confessed. He leaned back in his chair, without tasting his drink, and momentarily closed his eyes. His face looked livid, and every line in his slumping figure betrayed his complete weariness. "Well, I've had a hard day, but I suppose I must expect that. I didn't even get a chance to run through my mail this morning, I had so many callers who wanted to give me good advice, and meetings of my two major committees were called simultaneously. I hated to neglect one for the other. Then this afternoon the debate on the right to free speech and its use and abuse became very acrimonious, and it was over a matter I'm a good deal concerned about. I can't help worrying for fear the outcome will be pretty displeasing back home."

"Don't let 'em wear you down, Dad. Don't let 'em get your goat."

"I try not to, Bob, I try—— Well, I felt I must at least sign some letters before I started home, and I hadn't looked at the papers all day, so I sat down to look at the headlines. It was later than I thought when I left the office. That's probably why I'm so tired—— Will it really be a great disappointment to you; Edna, if you're not elected to this office?"

"It amazes me that you should ask me such a question, Robert. Surely you would have been disappointed if you had not been elected to office!"

Her husband's tired eyes widened for a moment, then closed again. He realized that his wife was not jesting, that she actually regarded the position which she coveted as comparable to a seat in

the United States Senate. He made an effort to speak kindly.

"If you feel there is anything the rest of us can do to help you—— I am not unmindful of how helpful you all were to me——"

"It is rather late to think of that now. You might all have helped me and you have all failed me. You, Robert, neglected to attend the beautiful official reception given by our President General."

"That rowdy crush!" interposed Bob, before his father could answer. "Why, Mumma, the poor old gent would've come home without his coat-tails! You came home without your train yourself!"

"And Helen would not even consent to serve as a page. She is so intent on affairs of her own nowadays——"

"Don't be so hard on Helen either," Bob objected, coming to the rescue a second time. "You can't expect her to feel the way you do about the D.A.R., Mumma. She hasn't got a bust for badges."

"This is not the moment for levity, Bob, much less for vulgarity. It is a grave moment. I recognize my Christian duty to be cheerful, under all circumstances, but these are trying times for me. My most formidable opponent, Mrs. Drayton of Detroit, enjoys every advantage which I do not. Her jewels are magnificent and her gowns are regal. I have only a few insignificant ornaments, and two of the models I bought, contrary to the assurances I received, were not exclusive. I have met other women wearing them and the effect was disastrous. Mrs. Drayton not only makes a far more imposing appearance than I do; her contributions are on an equally lavish scale. When we placed the memorial chairs in Constitution Hall, she contributed a whole row. I could give only half a chair."

"Which half did you give, Mumma? The seat or the back? What about the arms and legs? Or don't the D.A.R. have legs?"

"Bob," said Mrs. Morton, more in sorrow than in anger. "Bob, as I was saying when you so rudely interrupted me, Mrs. Drayton is not restricted by her husband's meagre salary, as I am. He manufactures automobiles instead of occupying an official position. Moreover, she belongs both to the Barons of Runnymede and the Colonial Dames, which I unfortunately do not, and the snobish members of these societies will all cast their votes for her. Last but not least, I am certain that she has made a number of glittering promises which she has not the slightest intention of fulfilling. Indeed, our Constitution will prevent her from carrying out many of these rash pledges she has made. There is no doubt, however, that she has made them. Otherwise, how would she ever have acquired so many superb floral offerings?"

"I shouldn't think it would be very exciting to get flowers from other women, that way. I think it's much more exciting to get

them from a man," remarked Helen, with a candour of which she would have been incapable a few months earlier.

"Well, the D.A.R.lings seem to get a thrill out of giving each other flowers all right. Maybe they haven't any of them got beaux who order big boxes of orchids sent up from the tropics by air mail," Bob remarked, winking at his sister. "Anyhow, Zoe Wing told me she'd checked with the florist who has a concession at Continental Hall this year, and those sweet creatures have enriched him by almost twenty thousand dollars since last Monday."

"That common, snooping, profane newspaper woman!" his mother exclaimed. She seemed to have forgotten all about her Christian duty and the voice, usually so well controlled, was shaking.

"She should have been prevented from entering our Hall in the first place! She should be expelled from it now! I cannot understand how the *Examiner* can lower its standards by accepting contributions from such a source. I thought you told me, Bob, that she had no connections with any of the metropolitan papers."

"She didn't have, when I told you so. She had just her own little hick syndicate. She's kept that, but she's gradually getting Metropolitan contacts, too. She's getting 'em, gradually. She snuck in to the office of Mr. Ruthven, the Managing Editor of the *Examiner*, on a bet. She dressed up like a messenger, bringing in his lunch, and before she came out of there she had him galvanized into giving her a break. These pieces of hers about the 'Congress' are just a special assignment. But they might land her on the staff of the *Examiner* for good. The whole town's talking about 'em. When I went over to the Capitol on the Senate subway this morning, Hyde and Slocum were roaring over the latest one and reading the best passages aloud to each other, above the clatter."

"Such conduct is beneath the dignity of the greatest legislative body in the world. I shall never feel the same towards Senator Slocum and Senator Hyde again. And I shall write to the *Examiner* before I close my eyes tonight. I shall tell that editor exactly what I think of Zoe Wing and of him."

"Well now, Edna, I wouldn't do that if I were you. I'd come to bed and get some rest. We both need our rest. We'll both feel better in the morning."

Soothingly, her husband led her away, his own fatigue forgotten. The next night, at the same time, Mrs. Morton had forgotten hers, too. For when the ballots were all counted and recounted, she was revealed as the winner over Mrs. Drayton of Detroit by a margin of seven votes. Proudly she took her place on the platform, wearing a wider ribbon than she had ever worn before, the insignia of her new office. Three chairs instead of two were required to hold her bouquets. A phalanx of photographers snapped her picture. The hall rang with applause. When she left the auditorium, her

fellow-members crowded around her, kissing her and calling her pet names. Her family had never addressed her as anything but Edna. In the Society she was variously known as "Nadine," "Birdie" and "Bluey." She heard these terms of endearment echoing on every side, and the sound was music in her ears. She remembered again that a true patriot is always gracious, forbearing and benign, especially to her inferiors, and conducted herself accordingly.

With the Continental Congress successfully out of the way, Mrs. Morton was able to turn her attention more intensively to her official duties as a senator's wife during the rest of the spring; but these still kept her far too busy to increase them by launching a *débutante*. She accepted all the invitations she received, undeterred by the high price attached to many of these. Invitations to attend morning musicales, invitations to serve on committees for worthy causes, invitations to serve as a patroness for balls. These were all more numerous than invitations to private luncheons and dinners, though Mrs. Endicott remained unremitting in her hospitality and a few other important personages followed suit. Stiffing a slight pang because not more of these seemed impressed by her arrival in Washington, Mrs. Morton made calls from four to six-thirty every day, except on alternate Thursdays, when she received herself; she joined the Congressional Club and the Ladies of the Senate. Philosophically she fed the multitudes who poured in upon her because of curiosity, ennui, habit and the necessity of scouring around for free nourishment; triumphantly she defeated the wives of many prominent legislators as their ladies sat around Congressional bridge tables; and glowingly she received the praise that was bestowed on her cucumber cream salad when she was one of the hostesses in the Committee Room at the Senate Office Building where the Ladies of the Senate assembled every Tuesday for luncheon. She did not think it was necessary to disclose that Helen, instead of herself, was responsible for the concoction of the salad. Indeed, she thought of her daughter comparatively little in those hectic, prideful days. It was not until early May, when an unexpectedly aristocratic caller revealed a surprising plan, that she remembered that she had been bent, before leaving Mortonville, on presenting Helen to Washington society with the least possible delay.

The caller had heralded her arrival by a charming little note. "Dear Mrs. Morton"—she had written—"I realize that this 'Little Season' of ours—which privately I think the most delightful of the year!—must be keeping you very, very busy, for I know how tremendously in demand you are everywhere. But *might* I run in, some morning about eleven—if that isn't too, too early—and have a little chat with you? There is an important matter I do want so much to discuss with you, and you're always completely

surrounded on your days at home! Most cordially yours, Lavinia Lovelace (Mrs. James Archibald Lovelace, Jr.)."

This note had pleased Mrs. Morton very much indeed. She did not have the slightest recollection of having seen Mrs. Lovelace in her apartment, or indeed anywhere else; but she answered promptly, and said she would be glad to receive her would-be caller on Saturday, the twelfth, at eleven-thirty, because eleven was, indeed, a trifle too early, and in her own turn she was very cordially, Edna Rossiter Morton.

Mrs. Lovelace was prompt to the minute. Mrs. Morton, who had unexpectedly been called to Continental Hall for a conference with the President General, found the stranger awaiting her on her return to the apartment at eleven-thirty-five. Mrs. Lovelace greeted her with effusion.

"Now I am not going to take up one moment more than I can help of your too, too valuable time," she said sweetly. She was a little round ball of a woman, with a spotted veil billowing from her large hat, and a lace-trimmed jabot cascading down the curving front of her fringed dress. She smiled and twinkled with every word she spoke, and she patted Mrs. Morton's hand reassuringly as she gushed along. Mrs. Morton was delighted with her caller.

"It is perhaps not as valuable as you think. I am extremely sorry that I was not here to receive you. But, of course, a summons from the President General— All this unjustified uproar about the 'black list' has precipitated many problems—as if we did not have a right to exclude undesirable speakers from our platforms."

"Of course, of course, *dear* Mrs. Morton. I understand *entirely*. And it *is* valuable. That is why I have ventured to approach you. Because it has occurred to me that as a native Washingtonian—there are so, so few of us!—that I could be of help to you. With your too, too lovely little daughter."

"With Helen?" Mrs. Morton inquired, genuinely puzzled.

"Yes. With dear, sweet, lovely little Helen. Of course she will be making her *début* in the fall, as she didn't this spring, and of course you will want her to be the *leading* débutante of the winter. Oh, you won't misunderstand me, will you, dear Mrs. Morton? Because that would distress me *beyond words*—it would really *break my heart*. With all her charm and beauty, Helen couldn't *help* but be a success! Still, there's nothing like doing things *exactly* right, is there? Nothing like the very *best* form of presentation?"

Still puzzled, but determined not to betray this, Mrs. Morton admitted that there was not.

"I *knew* you would agree with me, dear Mrs. Morton. I *knew* you would want to leave everything to me. Because, you see, as a native Washingtonian, I can do everything to supply that perfect presentation for Helen which we *all* have so much at heart. I will select a date for her dance which will not conflict with any other

débutante's—in fact, I *have* selected it, subject to your approval, of course, and Helen's. And then the *place*. I don't need to tell you how important that is. Of course it's too, too terrible that you're not a member of Grasslands, because there's nothing *quite* like it for cachet, is there? Don't *tell* me you haven't even been there yet? Now I can see how *necessary* it was that I should have come to you this morning. *Nécessary* and *right*! Isn't it, dear Mrs. Morton?"

Mrs. Morton was at last beginning to grasp the purpose of Mrs. Lovelace's visit, though the details of this kind-hearted lady's plan were not yet clear to her.

"You mean," she said, "that you have come to see me expressly to offer to take charge of Helen's *début*?"

"Yes, Mrs. Morton, that is it exactly!" replied Mrs. Lovelace, patting her hostess's hand again, even more affectionately than before. "I will attend to *everything*. I will make up the list and see that it is *exclusive* and still *ample*. I will cope with all the photographers who are so frightfully, frightfully importunate, and make sure that Helen's photograph is used at *just* the right time and in *just* the right places. Of course, there's no problem at *all* with Helen, she's such a little beauty, every one of the smartest magazines will be clamouring for her picture, but sometimes just a little *arrangement* is necessary even then! I will confer with florists and caterers also, and the too, too tiresome tradespeople who shouldn't even come near you and dear little Helen. She must conserve every particle of her precious strength, because she's going to be very, very busy. And, of course, I shan't desert her after her own *début*. I shall be right at her side, and yours, all winter long, to see that she is advanced and you are spared, dear Mrs. Morton. Because you must conserve your strength too. For all those *wonderful* organizations you are so interested in and that simply wouldn't know how to get along without you!"

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate your interest, Mrs. Lovelace," Mrs. Morton said sincerely. "Now if Helen were only in we could settle everything, couldn't we, this very morning? But she's out. She's a rather quiet girl, you know, Mrs. Lovelace. I must confess to you I've been quite astonished to find she's made a considerable number of friends already."

"Of course she has, dear Mrs. Morton, of course she has! The lovely little girl! But just a bit of guidance wouldn't be a bad thing, would it? The teeniest, weeniest bit! I mean, I understand that she sees a great deal of Veronique Alfieri, and Ronnie is a charming, beautiful child and all that. But then you and I know that a *patent medicine heiress* would never penetrate to those *inner circles* that I am planning to open wide for your dear little daughter."

It was a shock to Mrs. Morton to learn that Veronique Alfieri was

not, after all, as important socially as she had imagined. As Mrs. Lovelace purred on, she continued to undermine her hostess's self-confidence.

"And then that young Mexican attaché is *most* attentive, isn't he? Oh, I must beg you again not to misunderstand me. That would be too, too dreadful. I never have heard a *breath* against his character, and that is so rare, isn't it, in the case of a Latin—I mean a Latin-American. Now I know the most *fascinating* young Italian prince who is *dying* to meet dear little Helen, only he and other nice young men I might mention don't like to *intrude*. She is always so preoccupied with this young Indian—I mean this young Mexican. Really and truly, I *never* heard he had a single drop of Indian blood. But Bonatelli——"

Like most Americans, Mrs. Morton was always ready to lend an attentive ear to the mention of a prince, and her pleased thoughts continued to dwell on him for some time after her visitor had left her. Then her reverie was interrupted, somewhat abruptly, by the arrival of Helen herself. The girl entered, looking flushed and care-free, dressed in a riding-habit. She had been trained to "report in" after every outing, so she dutifully came to the living-room to speak to her mother. But she showed no disposition to linger, or to go into any details about her engagements. Mrs. Morton detained her.

"Helen," she said. "Helen. Where have you been?"

"I've been riding in the park, Mother."

"It puzzles me to know how you are always able to borrow a horse, Helen."

"It needn't. Alfredo has several. He's only too glad to loan me one."

"I have been meaning to speak to you about this young Mexican, Helen. You seem to be seeing a good deal of him."

"I am, Mother. And I'd love to talk to you about him. But I can't do it this morning. I'm late for lunch as it is."

"And where are you going *now*?"

"I'm going to Veronique's, Mother."

"Well, well. Of course you must keep your appointment with Veronique today, if you have already made it definitely. But I suggest that you do not commit yourself to her either quite so much in the future as you have in the past. I have reason to believe that you will soon be receiving a great many very desirable invitations, and you should be free to avail yourself of them."

"I thought you felt Veronique's invitations were very desirable, Mother."

"Well, yes, in a way. Of course, she has a large circle of acquaintances and I have been glad to have you take advantage of this. But now I have reason to believe that it is not the most exclusive sort of circle."

"Who gave you these reasons?" Helen asked, with startling directness.

"A charming woman named Mrs. Lovelace, who is a real Washingtonian—'a cave dweller,' as they are so quaintly called here. She very kindly came to see me this morning with the most friendly purpose. She has offered to take entire charge of your début."

"For how much?" inquired Helen, again with startling directness.

"My dear! I'm amazed at you! This was an act of kindness! The subject of money was not even mentioned!"

"Mother! I'm amazed at you!" Helen retorted. (There was no doubt about it, Mrs. Morton thought. Helen was getting into very bad habits with Veronique and Welby Hunter and the Mexican attaché and the rest of that "common crowd." It was entirely unlike the gentle, quiet girl to "talk back.") "Of course it wasn't mentioned. But that was on purpose so that you would involve yourself so deeply you couldn't draw back before it was. Mrs. Lovelace and two or three hated rivals of hers make a regular business and a very good living, bringing out girls who come from out of town—and some who don't, but who haven't belonged to this exclusive circle she talks about, and who want to. I don't. Not if I have to buy my way into it. I'd rather never have anyone come to see me at all than to have my guests chosen from a list someone else had made up. I don't want to come out, anyway, you know that. But if I've got to do it, I'm going to do it my own way. I want my own friends to come to the party, the people who've been nice to me already. I can make up a list myself."

"I doubt if it would be a suitable or adequate list, Helen, unless you were guided by someone who had position and experience. And you would not know how to choose the best place."

"I've chosen the place already. I want to have my party at the Congressional Club. I think Father's worrying about money, and it won't cost us anything to give it there, because you're a member. What difference does it make whether the Congressional Club is as smart as Grasslands? We're not as smart as the people who belong to Grasslands. We haven't lots of money or lots of background. We're just nice people from a small town."

"Your father has been Governor of his state. He is a member of the United States Senate. I am a national Vice-President of the N.S.D.A.R."

"Ye-es. But 'cave dwellers' aren't awfully impressed with all that. They have another set of standards about what makes people important. Why can't we stick to our own? They're just as good. In fact, I think they're a lot better than Mrs. Lovelace's. I've met her several times. She reminds me of a pussycat. I can see the claws creeping out of those fat little hands of hers even when she's patting me. I can see the sharp little teeth on either side of her smooth

pink tongue even when she's flattering me. Of course she loves to lap up cream, but she loves to bite too. It's part of her nature. While she's purring away I never feel quite sure she won't begin to yowl at any moment. Mrs. Endicott wouldn't let her arrange Veronique's debut. She's angry about that and vindictive. She'll probably be angry about me and vindictive too. But I don't care. I meant what I said about the Congressional Club, Mother."

"It grieves me to see you changing so, Helen. Bob's conduct has been a source of sorrow to me for some time, as you know. But I never expected that yours would be."

"If I could change so that I'd be like Bob I'd be perfectly delighted. I'm sorry, Mother, but I'll be awfully late for luncheon if I talk to you any more about this now. I'll be glad to do it some other time, if you want me to."

Mrs. Morton did want her to. She enjoyed prolonged discussions, even when these involved endless repetitions and considerable acrimony. She had a marked talent for wearing her opponents down, not because she convinced them that she was right and they were wrong, but because she had more powers of endurance than they had. This time, however, she made no headway at all. Her husband and her son both aligned themselves with Helen against her. It was the first time Senator Morton had ever done this. His desertion was a bitter blow to his wife.

"I don't know how I can keep going as it is, Edna. You see, a lot of our expenses in Mortonville are just what they always were. And they're mounting here all the time. I'm badly behind on my bills. I couldn't even pay the rent last month. The manager spoke to me. I want Helen to have a good time, every girl has a right to that. And she's our only daughter. We'll manage somehow. But the less it can cost to bring her out, as you call it, the better it'll be for all of us in the end."

"I'm sure I do my best to economize. We keep only one maid. We keep only one car. We do practically no entertaining. Look at the way most senatorial families live. The Hykes, for instance."

"Yes. Hyde's a big cattle man. He owns ranches from one end of Texas to the other. And most of my colleagues have independent means. I haven't, to any extent. I explained that to you when you urged me to run for the senate, Edna. I told you I was afraid you'd have some disappointments in Washington, that you'd have to be prepared to meet them. You've already found out I was right, when you ran up against Mrs. Drayton."

"That is all over and done with now. Perhaps you had better let me take charge of apportioning payments for a time, Robert. Of course seventy-five hundred dollars is not an adequate salary, but with proper management it should go fairly far."

"Yes, in Mortonville. But not in Washington. Above all, not in

Mortonville and Washington. You may see the bills if you want to. You may add them up if you want to. I'm afraid you'll find their sum total rather staggering. Just think a minute, Edna. Our rent here is three hundred dollars a month. Our food comes to more than another hundred. And you spent nearly a thousand on clothes this spring."

"In my position, Robert, I have to be well dressed. It is unfair of you to reproach me for trying to do you credit."

"I am not reproaching you, Edna, about anything. But I am trying to explain that we can't go on, indefinitely, spending money we haven't got. When my credit begins to crack, we'll be in trouble."

"I haven't had the slightest difficulty about having things charged. All the stores seemed delighted to have me open accounts."

"Yes. But now they're beginning to send in bills marked 'Please remit,' and little notes beginning, 'No doubt it has escaped your attention'— We won't talk about it any more, Edna, since the subject's so unwelcome to you. But I think Helen has the right idea when she says she wants to do things as simply as possible."

Mrs. Morton felt extremely uncomfortable at the prospect of telling Mrs. Lovelace that their charming plans were all coming to naught. In fact, she so greatly dreaded to do so that she finally confided her fears to Isabel Windsor, whom she did not see very often, but whom she fortuitously happened to encounter one afternoon at a White House garden party. Although she had some difficulty in detaching Isabel from importunate acquaintances who seemed bent on interrupting a conversation which Mrs. Morton desired to keep private, she finally succeeded in drawing her away beyond the striped marquee where refreshments were being served and the raised platform where the scarlet-coated Marine band was playing lively tunes. Isabel, who had given no sign of resentment or surprise at her forcible separation from her friends, listened to Mrs. Morton for a few moments with every indication of attentive sympathy. Then, with a gay little laugh, she gently broke in.

"Forgive me for stopping you, Mrs. Morton. It's terribly rude, I know. But I can't bear to see you so worried, and all about nothing! Of course, I'll speak to Lavinia Lovelace right away and tell her I'd been planning to give a dance for Helen at Grasslands. Stephen and I have belonged ever since I can remember—you know, we're 'real Washingtonians' too—even a little more real than Lavinia perhaps! I can't think why I didn't consult you about a party for Helen long ago—I've had the matter in mind for some time. But you and she must come to lunch with me next week, and we'll talk it all over."

"Oh, Mrs. Windsor, you can't think what a weight you take off my mind! Helen is growing so headstrong——"

"But, Mrs. Morton, I think Helen's idea about having a tea at the Congressional Club is very good. That would come first, of

course, and would be very official. Then a week or so later I'd have my own simple little party—just the youngsters I've known all their lives, and a few of my own contemporaries perhaps, to give the occasion more balance. Your special friends too, naturally. Would Wednesday at one suit you for a luncheon conference?"

Even Mrs. Morton's readiness in conversation was inadequate to express her relief. Besides, her attempt to do so was cut short, for the seclusion she had sought proved inadequate after all. She was interrupted again, this time by the arrival of Captain Giles Arnold. He made a striking appearance in his full-dress uniform, which his erect figure and easy carriage set off to excellent advantage. The absence of any head covering gave him a youthful look, and his fringed epaulets and wide belt shone in the sun. In the same way, his somewhat sombre face seemed illumined.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Morton," he said agreeably. "Hello, Isabel— Are you two ladies trying to see how much of the ground you can cover? I really don't think you should be so far from the house without an escort."

Isabel laughed. "We were getting along beautifully. Gentlemen never seem to learn how little we miss them, do they, Mrs. Morton? Has the receiving line broken up already, Giles?"

"Yes. The President's gone upstairs to work on his Memorial Day speech. And it occurred to me that it might be interesting for Mrs. Morton to make a tour of the historic trees. The magnolias were planted by Jackson, did you know that? Then there's the Hitchcock oak, associated with one of Theodore Roosevelt's pet jokes, and beyond it——"

Mrs. Morton was immensely flattered by Captain Arnold's thought of her. It was not until some time after that she realized the trees under discussion were all at the opposite end of the lawn, and that consequently another motive than a review of them might have prompted Captain Arnold to stray so far from their vicinity, when relieved from duty at the President's side. For a quarter of an hour arboreal archives absorbed her entire attention. Then Isabel reverted to their previous topic of conversation.

"We were discussing something else very interesting when you came up, Giles—Helen's *début*. Have you any suggestions to make?"

"Only that I hope she'll let me give her a dinner. Do you think she'd enjoy a dinner, Mrs. Morton?"

"A dinner at Giles' house before the dance Stephen and I give at Grasslands!" interposed Isabel quickly. "Why, that would be perfect, wouldn't it, Mrs. Morton? Giles has the best cook in Washington—and the best cellar and the best guest list. And then of course you should arrange something on shipboard for her too. Girls always love shipboard parties—that is, I always used to. What would you suggest, Giles?"

"The skipper of the *Mayflower* is a great pal of mine. I'm sure I

could persuade him to throw some kind of a shindig, if we can find out beforehand when the poor President can spare his own yacht."

"Why, that would be perfect too. Wouldn't it, Mrs. Morton?"

Mrs. Morton enthusiastically agreed that everything was perfect. As she strolled back towards the White House between Giles Arnold and Isabel Windsor the world suddenly seemed a very beautiful place, flooded with benignity. The broad lawn was dotted with gay little clusters of guests, who glanced at her enviously and greeted her cordially. The women looked charming in their wide hats and pale pastel dresses. The men's serges and shantungs were spotless. Beyond the lawn the curving staircase leading to the south portico was entwined with sweet-smelling honeysuckle and the magnolia trees bending above it were at the height of their bloom. On either side flower-beds were gay with roses, and from every direction came the sound of light laughter and pleasant voices. When Mrs. Morton turned to look back, she saw the fountain glittering against the shaft of the Washington Monument, and there were rainbow lights in it. The unwelcome vision of Lavinia Lovelace, roused to rage, faded from her mind, and life took on a rosy hue.

"I'm afraid you two will think I'm hopelessly sentimental," she said with a little sigh. "But this scene is so entrancing that I can't help thinking what a wonderful setting it would make for a love story. It seems too bad that so much music and perfume and sunshine should not produce romance. I do wish dear little Helen had been invited here too today. She might have met exactly the right man. I am afraid she has not, so far. What do you think, Captain Arnold?"

"About Helen? Or about this setting? Well, I wouldn't be pessimistic if I were you. Perhaps Helen's having a good time where she is. I've noticed that she generally does. And perhaps the romantic possibilities here won't be altogether wasted either. How do you feel about that, Isabel?"

"I'm inclined to agree with Mrs. Morton. I think they're almost inescapable. Shall we go up on the portico and see if somebody we know isn't taking advantage of them?"

Mrs. Morton declined to ascend the stairway, which looked steep to her, but she watched Isabel and Giles out of sight with benignity in her own heart; she said she would look forward to having them rejoin her later, after they had finished teasing their merry young friends. Slightly to her surprise they did not reappear, though she waited for them until the crowd had begun to thin; but she knew how persistently Mrs. Windsor was besieged on every side, and how hard it always was for her to break away. Moreover, Mrs. Morton was fortunate in meeting some official friends of her own, who suggested that she should go on to another party with them, and any slight of which she might otherwise have been conscious faded to

insignificance before this new mark of attention. She caught sight of the head usher sauntering by, his attentive eyes turning in all directions, and spoke to him with a sense of importance.

"Captain Arnold and Mrs. Windsor were expecting me to meet them here. But Senator and Mrs. Hyde want very much to have me join them to attend another function. They have pressed me so, I really do not feel I can decline. Will you tell Captain Arnold when you see him why I felt I could not wait?"

"I'd be very glad to, Mrs. Morton. Captain Arnold must have been detained in some way. Possibly the President sent for him."

She thought there was something a little strange about the head usher's smile. But then, he was not an especially prepossessing man; he could not compare in looks with the President's Naval aide, whose smile was certainly charming. And, after all, the head usher certainly had very nice manners. She did not fail to note that he had called her unhesitatingly by name. She was getting better and better known all the time. Even William, the old carriage-man, summoned her car without prompting, and she had learned to gauge the significance of this. And now that Helen was to have that select dance at Grasslands after all, with an aristocratic Washingtonian as her hostess, there was really nothing left to be desired of the pattern into which life was shaping.

Helen felt exactly the same way. The White House was not the only accessible place, by any means, where pale magnolias bloomed and honeysuckle scattered its scent during the spring-time. In nearby Virginia there were great groves of magnolias, long hedges of honeysuckle. Both grew in profusion at Hunter's Green, where Welby and his blonde mother gave house-parties over every weekend. There were some aspects of these house-parties which Helen did not enjoy, and she knew that she never would. But she had learned to escape from these, both physically and mentally, and to fill her time and thoughts in ways which meant increasingly much to her.

The honeysuckle and the magnolia were doubly beautiful when they were reflected in a pool, like the one in that terraced garden, especially when a full moon was shining too. Helen sat beside the edge of the pool and ran her fingers through it. Alfredo Terraza broke off a little branch of honeysuckle and tossed it into her lap. She did not take her fingers out of the pool to pick it up and put it on, but she looked up at him and smiled, invitingly. So when he broke a magnolia blossom from a branch he leaned over her and fastened it in her hair himself.

"Now you look like a Mexican maiden," he said. "That is the way the girls in my country wear flowers, Elena."

He always called her Elena now. She loved the sound of the name. It was so much more musical than Helen.

"Is it? Do they? Do I? But my hair isn't black and smooth and my eyes aren't large and languorous. I couldn't look like a Mexican maiden, Alfredo. I couldn't ever be half so beautiful as one."

"Your hair is like a fairy's and your eyes are like an angel's. You're a thousand times more beautiful than any Mexican maiden I have ever seen."

"Am I? Alfredo, I think Welby and Veronique are almost engaged. I think they probably will be before the week-end's over."

"Welby and Veronique? Not Bob and Veronique after all?"

"No. Bob won't talk to me about it—it's the first time, Alfredo, that Bob hasn't talked to me confidentially—but I don't think he's asked her. I think Veronique would've said yes if he had. I think she's very fond of Bob. But then Welby's very fond of her. And a girl can't wait for ever, can she, Alfredo, if a man doesn't ask her?"

"In my country a girl might wait a long time. That is, if she were sure that a man loved her. Of course, if she were not sure, that would be altogether different."

"But how could she be sure, Alfredo?"

"In a thousand ways. By the light in his eyes when he looked at her. By the tone of his voice when he spoke to her. By the feeling of his hand when he touched her. All these would tell her of his love, even though he never put it into words. And she would know that there was a reason for his silence, and that the time would come when he would speak and say to her, 'Soul of my soul, I am utterly yours. Will you honour my home and bless my life by accepting the unworthy offering which I humbly lay before you?'"

Alfredo put his own hand in the pool, closing it over Helen's wet fingers. They lay unresistingly in his, and by and by he drew them slowly out of the water and raised them to his lips. It was very still in the garden beside the pool. Alfredo and Helen knew that they were alone there, because the moonlight was so bright that they could see in all directions, but in the stillness they could hear a long way, much further than they could see. And out of the stillness and the distance they suddenly heard a girl's voice, crying aloud, and the words that she was saying.

"Let me go, you rotten cad! You can't get away with everything! Not with me anyway! Not unless—not until——"

The sound was smothered as suddenly as it had rung out. After that there was only stillness again, overwhelming silence in the glowing moonlight. Alfredo rose, drawing Helen to her feet at the same time.

"Yes, there are a thousand different ways," he repeated, gravely and rather sadly. "A young girl must decide for herself whose love she can trust and to whom she can trust her own love in return. Shall we go into the house, Elena? It grows very late for you to be out in the garden beside this moonlit pool."

She had decided for herself. That of course was the principal reason why she was so happy. All other reasons, including the ten months' delay before she made her *début*, were merely incidental. She stood smiling, holding her old-fashioned bouquet of roses and forget-me-nots, and, every now and then, giving a little backward push to her full skirt to prevent it from frothing out in front of her. The pink bows which caught it up were supposed to confine it too. But they did not do so completely; it was so gauzy that it kept billowing about her, and she did not want her guests to brush against it as they went by and spoil its freshness.

The rack behind her was very tall and very wide, but it had become necessary to supplement it with two other racks on either side of her. She had a great many flowers, more than Alicia Roszel and Marie Basanta who had come out the week before; ever so many more than Polly Rutledge who had come out the week before that. She was rather astonished that this was so, especially as Marie and Polly were both making their *débuts* under Mrs. Lovelace's guidance. She had seen Mrs. Lovelace, very much in evidence, at their parties, and had spoken to her pleasantly, not because she liked her any better than she ever had, but because it was Helen's way to speak to everyone pleasantly. Mrs. Lovelace had looked at her vaguely the first time, as if she had never seen Helen before, and the second time she had not looked at her at all. This seemed strange to Helen, but she was far too happy in her own pursuits to be troubled by Mrs. Lovelace's lapse of memory.

But there was another puzzling thing that had happened. Although Mrs. Lovelace had told Mrs. Morton how much care she took to see there was no conflict in the dates of *débuts*, she had arranged a party for Rosamond Woodbridge, still another *débutante*, on the same day as Helen's, to which Helen was not invited at all. Helen spoke of this, thinking there must be some mistake, to Alicia Roszel, who had become a great friend of hers, and Alicia had given her some enlightening information.

"Why, that's an old trick of the pussycat's! Didn't you know? She's done it on purpose, hoping to detract from your party. And, of course, you've been dropped from her list. She wouldn't do that too suddenly—witness your invitations to Marie's party and Polly's. But she figured that Rosamond's was a good place to begin, especially as Rosamond is just wax in her hands. I heard that her dinner last night was a perfect frost, if that's any comfort to you. Nobody knew anybody else, and Mrs. Woodbridge went around helplessly saying, 'I do hope these nice young people are having a good time, but they don't act as if they were, and I can't think of anything to do about it. I never saw a single one of them before myself.' Poor woman, she was almost wringing her hands. But she's a fool too, or she wouldn't have lent herself to this racket. That's what it all is, you know—a perfect racket."

Helen was beginning to see this for herself. But still the knowledge did not dampen her enjoyment. She was happy about everything, but especially about her flowers, though in a way she felt guilty over these in the light of what she had said to her mother concerning floral offerings from other women. For the first time she understood Mrs. Morton's gratification over the heaped-up bouquets on the chairs at Constitution Hall. She resolved to tell her mother that she was sorry she had ever said that it could not be exciting to have other women send you flowers. Because she was excited about all of those she had received, no matter who had sent them, and thrilled because there were so many that she could not possibly keep them all in the apartment. The next day some would be sent to the Children's Hospital, where Mrs. Morton was now serving on the Board of Lady Managers, and some to the girls in her father's office and some to the Louise Home, where she had formed a friendship with one of the old ladies who was a relative of Welby Hunter.

But there were some flowers that she would not give away. The purple violets from Isabel Windsor, for instance, and the spicy carnations from Giles Arnold. She had always thought that violets were old-fashioned and carnations unimaginative, but when she saw the lovely form that both could take she changed her mind. She would not give away the button chrysanthemums from Zoe Wing either; they were just the colour of Zoe's own hair, tawny and gorgeous.

Mrs. Morton had not wanted to invite Zoe Wing to the party. She had said, grudgingly, that she supposed they could not help inviting the society editors on the four daily newspapers, or the Vice-President's daughter, who was, so unaccountably, a writer, or the head of the Bureau of a New York newspaper, the man who went about in an evening cape, so that she was always mistaking him for an ambassador, and whom everybody seemed to ask everywhere. But beyond this she could not and would not go; after all, there were limits. Nevertheless, Zoe Wing had turned up at the party, looking extremely smart in a jade-green ensemble trimmed with leopard. (At least, it resembled leopard; Mrs. Morton said it was probably just dyed rabbit or even some cheap spotted fabric.) What was more, she had sent those flowers beforehand, nice flowers, and lots of them, bought from a good florist. Helen hoped they did not represent a substantial sacrifice on her part, for though Zoe was now on the staff of the *Examiner*, as Bob had predicted she would be, her salary did not amount to much, and the flowers made a brave showing indeed. Even so, they could not compare with the flowers Alfredo had sent.

These had been packed in a transparent box, so that Helen could see them even before she undid this; and they lay on a bed of green moss, which was cool and damp. Among them were creamy roses,

faintly flushed with pink, on which the dew still glistened, and golden orchids flecked with bronze, and crimson camellias and gardenias that were as white as snow and as large as water-lilies. There were lilies, too, of all sorts, some pale and sweet-smelling and familiar and some vivid and scentless and strange. She would be able to fill her room, for days, with the flowers Alfredo had sent, and wear one or two of them every time she went out, and still she would have more and more to draw on.

There had been a time when she had not cared much for orchids, because she had grown so tired of seeing them, always in the same shade of purple and often in a semi-wilted condition, pinned to her mother's shoulder among the badges. But the orchids Alfredo sent were different. They came in every shape and shade, they quivered with delicacy, and when she put them on, they seemed to nestle against her heart. They meant more to her than she had dreamed anything like a flower could mean.

She had not put any of them on today, because she knew she must not spoil the effect of her French dress; but as she clasped her old-fashioned bouquet she kept thinking about them, and every time she thought of them her smile deepened. She was so happy about them, and about everything, that when Veronique and Welby came down the line she kissed them both and told them that she had hardly been able to wait to see them and that she hoped they had had a wonderful honeymoon motoring in France. She had not expected to feel as if she could greet them so cordially, though she had been Veronique's maid of honour, and had shared in all the festivities of a magnificent marriage. Because deep down in her heart she had never been wholly happy that Veronique and Welby had married each other. She had never forgotten the cry that had pierced the silent night, or the sadness in Alfredo's voice when he said there were a thousand different ways in which a man might show his love, and that a girl must decide for herself whom she could trust and whom she could love in return. She did not believe that Veronique loved Welby or trusted him, and she was afraid that because of Welby, Veronique would never really love or trust any man again. Veronique could have trusted Bob and he could have helped her in all sorts of ways. And he hadn't. He didn't care about helping her. The only person he wanted to help was Zoe Wing, who would have almost nothing to do with him.

CHAPTER V

Bob's failure to confide in Helen had left her uninformed about his sentiments towards Veronique Alfieri and Zoe Wing. But his very lack of candour raised her suspicions and these were well-founded.

His first reaction to Veronique was stimulating, but shallow. He saw enough of her, under advantageous conditions, to tell Helen that she gave him a "cheap thrill." But he shrugged his shoulders when he did so, and Helen had reason to believe that he never progressed, or attempted to progress, as far as "heavy petting" with her, though Helen reproved him once for the way he spoke about her.

"I thought Veronique looked wonderful tonight," she said to her brother, in the course of one of their bed-time tête-à-têtes. "But I really don't think she has enough on."

"I had a feeling she hadn't, myself," Bob retorted with a grin.

"Bob! Honestly——"

He accepted Veronique's invitations to Greystone Towers with alacrity and danced with her a good deal when he happened to meet her at parties elsewhere, but he seldom "dated" her himself. At Hunter's Green he succeeded in irritating Welby Hunter, but not in satisfying Veronique. When Helen told him, as severely as she knew how, that he was acting like a dog in the manger, he shrugged his shoulders again.

With Zoe Wing his attitude was entirely different. She had roused his admiration immediately, and he had shown this, both to her and to his family. But Zoe was not half so receptive to his attentions as Veronique. As a matter of course, he had attempted to kiss her when he said goodnight to her upon leaving her "tenement" for the first time, and was sincerely startled by her resentment.

"You get to hell out of here! I didn't ask you to see me home. I told you I didn't give a damn whether you did or not. I added that I was used to looking after myself, and I meant it. I had you sized up as a cheapskate all right, but I didn't think you were that cheap or that swift a skater. You better go while the going's good. I'm liable to get really bitchy, if you're unreasonable."

"Gosh, Zoe, all I wanted was to have you tell me goodbye nicely."

"What a damned lie! Come on now, clear out, you son of a gun!"

For the first time in his life, Bob had retreated, crestfallen and bewildered. The next day he had written Zoe a letter, to which he received no answer. Then he telephoned her. When she found who

was at the other end of the line, she hung up. Increasingly piqued and puzzled, he besought Helen's co-operation.

"Look here. Why don't you ask Zoe Wing to supper again one of these days? We had fun the first time."

"Ye-es. But Mother doesn't approve of Zoe Wing. She was provoked because we invited her before. And that was just on the spur of the moment. I'm sure she'd be really annoyed if we planned for it."

"Well, she's annoyed because Alfredo Terraza shows up, every time she has a day at home, to call on you. She might just as well be annoyed with both of us as with one of us, while she's about it. In fact, if she were annoyed at me, it might take her mind off you."

Helen felt there was much which was commendable in Bob's logic. A few days later, when she saw Zoe Wing, looking even shabbier, hungrier and more defiant than ever, making the rounds of the boxes at the Fort Myer Horse Show, she spoke to her impetuously.

"Miss Wing! I'm Helen Morton—perhaps you'd forgotten me. Were you looking for friends or are you alone? Well then, won't you stay with us for a while? Bob can sit on the steps and you can have his seat."

Zoe glanced at Helen appraisingly, but it was evident that she had no axe to grind, for herself anyway, and there was no condescension in her cordiality. Zoe nodded, briefly, with a muttered acknowledgment of Helen's introductions amidst the rest of the gilded group, and sat down in the chair Bob had just vacated without looking at him at all.

"Thanks. No, I'm not with friends. I'm all alone as usual. I'll stay for a minute. But I've got to look around and see who's here. Do you happen to know who that is in the second box to the left?"

"It's a Miss Flora Treadway from Middleburg, with a party of friends. I think Welby knows her. Don't you, Welby? Would you like to meet her, Miss Wing?"

"Oh, don't bother about any more introductions! I'll cruise along and speak to her in a minute. She won't throw me out of the box. And I don't think any of her boy friends will try to pick me up. I'm not their tweedy type. Gosh, that's a grand horse that came into the ring just then!"

Her eyes turned from the occupants of the boxes, whom she regarded with thinly veiled contempt, to the hunters that were cantering around the ring, and her expression changed completely. For the first time Helen saw a softness come over her face, giving it bloom and beauty which had not been there before, and a look of longing that had a poignant quality.

"Do you care about horses?" she asked kindly.

"Do I care about horses! And me born in Kentucky! I care a

damn sight more about horses than I do about any of the trashy human species I've ever seen."

She rose abruptly, giving a tug to her shabby jacket. Bob also rose.

"I want to speak to Flora Treadway myself," he said. "She's asked me to come in for cocktails after the Warrenton Gold Cup, and I must tell her I can't make it. Mind if I come along?"

"Yes, but it's a free country," Zoe Wing said brutally. "So long, sweetness— Any chance that I could get you to my 'tenement' some time? I'll ask a couple of girls from the *Examiner* in, and we'll have us a meal. For women only. What's the best night for you?"

"I think Monday would be all right," Helen answered a little doubtfully.

"Good enough. Seven? Street clothes? Maybe I can snatch a Congresswoman for us— There's two of them that speak to me. Oh, are you still hereabouts, Mr. Morton? Right this way, if you please, sir."

"Look here. Do you have to insult me publicly?" Bob asked under his breath, as they wedged their way between the boxes and the railing.

"Is that any worse than insulting me privately?"

"I didn't mean to insult you. I like you a lot. I wish you'd come into the office sometime. I might be able to give you some tips."

"Oh yeah? I know a hell of a lot about tips with strings tied to them. Here's where I'm leaving you. I've decided that horsey Flora Treadway doesn't mean a damned thing to me after all."

She ducked down one of the warren-like stairways, and dove out of the door. Bob dove after her, but when he reached the sidewalk she was nowhere to be seen. A sentry stationed at the door gave him a curious glance.

"Anything I can do for you, sir?"

"You didn't see a red-headed girl here just now, did you, going as if she'd been shot out of a gun?"

"I can't say that I did, sir."

Bob did not trust the non-committal look on the sentry's face. But there seemed to be nothing he could do about it.

"Well, the ground must've swallowed her up then."

"It's a queer world," the sentry remarked, turning to salute an officer.

Senator and Mrs. Morton were dining at the French Embassy for the first time the next Monday night, and in her preoccupation over this social triumph, Mrs. Morton neglected to ask her daughter about her own plans for the evening. But Bob insisted on driving Helen to the "tenement" and gave her a few words of admonition on the way.

"I'll come for you any time you say. You might tell Zoe you're expecting me to call."

"It wouldn't do any good. You heard what she said—for women only."

"Well, for the luva Mike, you can *tell* her, can't you?"

"Yes, I can tell her."

Helen's predictions were correct. Zoe remained unmoved by the announcement that Bob was waiting outside, though the night was rainy and unseasonably cold. The party was prolonged, and several times during his interminable wait he thought he could hear sounds of merriment from within. When his sister rejoined him she brought the two girls from the *Examiner* with her, making the blithe announcement that she had offered them both a lift. One of them, whose name was Lisa Fendall, lived near the Soldiers' Home. The other, whose name was Brenda Bryant, lived in Alexandria, Helen, who sat on the front seat with Bob, kept turning around to chatter with them, and they chattered too, Mrs. Fendall in a brief staccato with a slight nasal twang, Miss Bryant in a soft fluent Southern drawl. Neither of them was profane like Zoe, and though Mrs. Fendall was well versed in the vernacular of the day, Miss Bryant, if she knew it, did not use it. Even Mrs. Morton would have been forced to admit that she was very genteel in both speech and manner; not in the least like Mrs. Morton's somewhat erroneous conception of a "typical newspaper woman."

Driving endlessly through the night, chilly and tired, Bob gathered from the chatter of the three girls that the party had been an immense success. The Vice-President's daughter, who wrote a highly successful column of her own, and a very nice Congresswoman had also been present. These two had lingered to talk with Zoe Wing about a Bill pending before the House after the others had left. The conversation throughout the evening had evidently been both stimulating and illuminating and finally it had become confidential.

"How did the Vice-President's daughter happen to be there?" Bob inquired, with genuine interest.

"Oh, she's really a lady—the kind that is born, not made," Lisa Fendall informed him briefly. "She doesn't have to be careful who she knows, like most of these sassiety dames. She never did shut herself up in an ivory tower. She and Zoe have been friends a long time. Say, wasn't that a swell feed Zoe gave us? She's a smarty pants all right. But I don't see why she isn't dead and buried, tearing around everywhere night and day and then coming home to cook besides writing her pieces."

It had never occurred to Bob that a journalist's life might entail endless hours of work, and he felt a strange pang at the thought of the perpetual fatigue which he now realized Zoe must accept as part of her natural lot. At the same time his mouth watered at

the description which ensued of the "swell feed." His own supper had been rather meagre, the Mortons' maid-of-all-work, who showed signs of restiveness, having been given a night off because of the Embassy dinner. So he had assembled the unappetizing contents of various stray dishes which he found in the ice-box, and had eaten these haphazardly in the kitchen. It made him rage, not only to hear about the succulent and hearty fare which Zoe had prepared, but also about the way in which it had been presented. For it next transpired that on a two-burner stove in her kitchenette Zoe had prepared corn chowder and spaghetti with meat sauce and hot biscuits and coffee and strawberry soufflé; and these, together with green salad in a wooden bowl and honey to spread on the biscuits, she had served in her bed-sitting room on the little table that stood in front of the convertible couch and which she had decorated for the occasion with daffodils and yellow candles.

"She certainly is a smarty-pants," Lisa Fendall kept reiterating. She smoked incessantly, and talked shop in her high, excited voice; much of what she said was unintelligible to Bob, but the drift of it was clear enough. "I should think she would have dropped in her tracks long ago, but she keeps right on going. And she knows what it's all about. She might win that bet about Ruthven at that, do you know it?"

She did. It was later that Bob heard for the first time about her rash visit to Mr. William Ruthven, the managing editor of the *Examiner*, disguised as a messenger boy. Without warning, she turned up in his father's office, dressed in a new spring outfit, and talked to him about it. She looked as smart as paint in her bargain basement clothes, and, for the first time, Bob heard her laugh, while she told him the story of securing her all-important assignment. She had a gay laugh that began with a tinkle and ended in a little half-chuckle, as if she were joking partly with the world at large and partly with herself.

"So now I'll be sitting on one of those memorial chairs in Continental Hall all next week! Damned if I ever thought I'd do a thing like that! But there's a story there—dozens of them. Those prim patriotic ladies are about the slickest politicians there are in this country; they've got a machine that would make Tammany blush and go sick to the stomach. Well, I hope your mother doesn't put arsenic in the soup the next time I come to supper with you."

"I'll see what I can do to stop her. When are you coming?" Bob inquired, trying to sound nonchalant and failing to succeed.

"Damned if I know. That sweet little sister of yours said I'd be welcome any time. Like hell I would. Your mother can't bear the sight of me now and after next week she'll be out for blood. But Helen certainly is one swell kid. Do you really have to sell her down the river?"

"Sell her down——?"

"Make her come out. She doesn't want to. And it's so damned unnecessary to go husband-hunting for her, cute as she is. I'd bet my bottom dollar she's got herself a beau already, and a good one, too. There's no need to auction her off. But I reckon it's none of my business. Well, I'll be cruising along. I just thought I'd drop in, like you asked me to, now that I don't need any tips and you couldn't get the wrong idea out of my little visit."

She departed, as suddenly as she had come. But before the excitement over her D.A.R.ing articles had died down, she reappeared, looking even more cocky than before.

"I've got an assignment for another series. On the Hill. Cripes, am I pleased! And I think you can help me after all, if you want to."

"I've been telling you for more than six months now that I want to."

"All right. I'm taking you at your word. But I'm not so damned sure that you'll be pleased after all. These pieces are to be on nepotism."

"Nepotism!"

"Yeah. Word of Latin derivation: *Nepos*, *nepotis*, nephew. Present meaning: 'favouritism to nephews or other relatives; bestowal of patronage by reason of relationship.' Present practice: Damned prevalent on the Hill. Take a look at the pay-roll of almost any member of Congress, in either House. Begin right here. You'll be stunned at the size of official families—no birth-control anywhere. Also at how well-represented they are. Not just nephews and nieces. Sons and daughters, wives and sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, cousins three and four times——"

"But the reason I'm my old man's secretary is because I can do more for him than anyone else. I understand him better. I'm willing to work harder. I——"

"That's what you say. I've got to be shown. So have a lot of other people."

"All right, I'll show 'em! If you write those articles, I'll write an answer to 'em that'll knock your arguments into a cocked hat! You better get off the Hill right now, before I get started! You know darn well that when I said I'd help you I didn't mean anything like that!"

"Of course I know it. Pleased to have you admit it yourself. Whose argument's knocked into a cocked hat now? As to getting off the Hill, right now or any other time, I might remind you this is a free country with a free press. You seem to have made a mistake about that, too! But I'll get out of your office, and if I ever set foot in it again, that'll be when hell freezes over!"

Bob leapt over his desk, ready to detain her forcibly and to shake her until her teeth chattered. He was seething with rage. But he might as well have grasped at the wind. Zoe Wing had gone again, banging the door after her, and the corridor was empty when he

reached it. The first of her articles on nepotism was published the next Sunday, as a feature, and announced as the first of a series. It was profusely illustrated by pictures of six senators, together with all the members of their families who worked in their offices. Senator Morton's and Bob's were among these.

The Mortons reacted variously to the appearance of this article. The Senator and Helen were both deeply hurt. Mrs. Morton was angry, but her rage was tempered by the fact that she was able to say "I told you so!" to the others—had she not said from the beginning that they were nurturing a viper in their bosoms through being kind to Zoe Wing? Perhaps the next time they would believe her. Bob's rage was not tempered by any consideration whatsoever. He sat down and wrote the threatened reply to Zoe Wing at white heat. This he mailed, not to her, but to Mr. Ruthven, the managing editor of the *Examiner*.

The form of the editor's response to this was another startling surprise. He wrote to Bob, congratulating him on his contribution, and saying he would be pleased to publish it, not among the letters from subscribers on the editorial page, but among the following Sunday's features, at the regular rates. He said it was the policy of the *Examiner* to present both sides of a debatable question whenever it was possible to secure sincere and able analyses of these. Possibly Mr. Morton might be willing to write other pieces for the paper. If so, he, William Ruthven, managing editor, would be very pleased to see them.

This unexpected turn of events had several equally unexpected results. The cheque from the *Examiner* was undeniably welcome, the suggestion that others might be forthcoming from the same source welcome also. But if Bob took advantage of these he would approach dangerously close to the despised field of journalism himself. He would be in the same general class with Zoe Wing. Even Mrs. Morton saw that she could not close her doors indefinitely to reporters if her son decided to become one. After some discussion, it was agreed that Bob should ask Mr. Ruthven if he would also publish an article refuting everything that Zoe had said about the D.A.R. If he would, Mrs. Morton thought that Bob might conceivably consent to favour the *Examiner* with further contributions, providing they were all lofty in character and increasingly well paid for.

Unfortunately Mr. Ruthven's approval of this plan was qualified. Yes, he said, without much enthusiasm, he could use a piece on the educational and patriotic programme of the Society and about its plant. Its members did have a real property sense—those handsome buildings of theirs were well constructed, well run and well financed. Besides, he knew some good work had been done with schools in the South, though of course there were all those rumours about the suppression of teachers' views if these were tinged with

pink. However, Zoe Wing could come back with another piece about that if she wanted to. Mr. Morton could confine himself to constructive comments and let her take the destructive side. That would be the best plan. Their opposing points of view, if sufficiently vehement and widely publicized, might well be translated into terms of increased circulation. But he couldn't use anything of the sort under discussion for almost another year—not until the Continental Congress was about to convene again. At present it would have no news value. He hoped Mr. Morton could think of something else on which he and Miss Wing might disagree.

Mr. Morton, at the moment, could think of nothing else; and when his rage had begun to abate, and the first flush of triumph over having penetrated into print, on a paid basis, had faded, he was far from satisfied with the *status quo*. He did not really want to quarrel with Zoe Wing, either privately or publicly. He wanted to make love to her. Every time he caught a fleeting glimpse of her—and the only glimpses he did catch in those days were fleeting—the desire to do this became more intense and uncontrollable. The impulse to shake her, which had been succeeded by an impulse to choke her, died down. He did want to get his hands on her shoulders, but only to draw her nearer to him. He did want to close his fingers around her throat, but only to see if it was as soft as it looked. It beat everything, the sort of skin that went with red hair—as snowy as a gardenia, and as smooth. He wished he could see Zoe Wing in an evening-dress, one of the extreme sort, such as Veronique wore. He was ready to bet his bottom dollar that Zoe could give Veronique cards and spades.

He got his wish at the next subscription ball to which he went, and which happened to be for the Navy Relief. He was dancing with Veronique when he saw Zoe brush by, and his heart missed a beat so suddenly that he missed a step, too, though he was a remarkably smooth and easy dancer. Zoe was dancing with a rather unkempt, but very able, newspaperman named Bert Scruggs, a representative of the *New York Enterprise*, and she herself looked anything but unkempt. Her dress was made of taffeta, as crisp and green as a lettuce leaf, and it had exactly the sort of wide-shirred skirt and low, tight-fitting bodice that he had longingly visualized her as wearing. Her neck and arms emerged from it with a whiteness that was dazzling; and her red hair, contrary to current fashion, being drawn up above the nape of her neck and away from the lobes of her ears, still more skin was disclosed. Bob had never seen such skin so startlingly revealed. He forgot Veronique completely, except to wish that someone would cut in and relieve him of her; and when Welby Hunter obligingly did this, Bob went across the Willard ballroom like an engineer on his way to a four-alarm fire.

Zoe greeted him with a grin. "Well, look who's here! If it isn't our own cub reporter!" she remarked, permitting herself to be

separated from Bert Scruggs without a struggle. But she contrived to keep herself curiously detached as she began her swing around the ballroom with Bob. Her words were warmer than her manner. "You wrote a hell of a good piece," she said cordially. "I'm damned if I thought you had it in you. You put your finger on every weak place in my own story, and there were plenty. You said you'd knock my arguments into a cocked hat and you did. If you can keep turning them out like that you'll go places. What's your next come-back going to be, big boy?"

"I'm not going to write another article until next spring. Then I'm going to do one on the good work of the D.A.R."

"You mean you're turning down Ruthven's offer of a steady job?"

"Well, yes. You see——"

Zoe shrugged her shoulders. The result was an even more generous display of white skin than had been visible before, and Bob's heart missed another beat. But with the shrug she became still more detached.

"Well, I might've known," she said tersely. Brief as her statement was, however, it betrayed something akin to personal disappointment. The revelation gave Bob a fresh surprise.

"I thought you'd be mad as hops because I'd come back at you! You don't mean to tell me you hoped I'd go on doing it."

"Sure I did. Because it would've shown you had some guts. I doubted that before. Now I know you haven't any."

"Look here——"

"Why, I'm looking all right! And there's nothing the matter with my eyesight either! You have a swell chance to make good on your own and you let it slip right through your feeble fingers! Well, you better stay on Puppa's payroll, where you belong. I reckon I wasn't so far off in what I said after all."

"I thought you'd be pleased to have me shut up."

"Oh, go to hell! Your sister's the only one of the whole kit and cargo of you that's worth her salt. I'm sorry if I hurt her feelings—she thinks you're a little tin god on wheels. I'll tell her you aren't, if I get the chance, and I'll tell her I'm sorry, too. But I don't know when I'll have the chance. I'm going away."

"You're going away!" echoed Bob, with undisguised dismay.

"Yeah. Me and my jallop. I've made a down payment on one out the last three cheques I got from the *Examiner*. I've talked Ruthven into letting me take a try at touring around in it this summer, going as far as I can raise the price of gas to take me. I've got to pay my own expenses. But if the pieces are good I'll get a raise. I'm going to tell all about what I see by the way and by the wayside. We're calling the series 'Zoe and her Zephyr.' The jallop was a Zephyr once, but you'd never know it now unless you were told."

"You mean I won't see you again all summer!"

"You guessed it. Oh, good-evening, Captain Arnold! Yes. I'd be delighted——"

Bob had not previously realized that Zoe knew Giles Arnold, and he looked on morosely as she whirled away, seemingly pleased and gay, with the striking officer. There was no reason why he should not have cut in on Giles in his own turn, but with real unselfishness he decided he should not interfere either with her obvious pleasure or the prestige which the Captain's public notice of her would give; then presently she vanished from the ball completely, according to her own mysterious fashion. During the next two months Bob followed her progress only through the pages of the *Examiner*; but this progress was sufficiently startling to keep him constantly on the alert. "Zoe and her Zephyr" achieved immediate and unprecedented success. The seemingly haphazard travel articles which Zoe wrote about people and places that had not previously proved in the least provocative captured the unpredictable fancy of an eager public almost overnight. The *Examiner* began to run advertisements about the series—one column at first, then two columns, then half a page. Before long its delivery trucks, scooting around the city, were placarded with Zoe's name and that of her jalopy in red letters a foot high. Her picture, and the Zephyr's, appeared in the Rotogravure section. She was revealed parked in front of factories, circling about playgrounds, lunging up to swimming pools, winding her way through forests, transporting haphazard guests to barbecues, and rearing towards the platform at out-of-doors song feasts. Bob, to whom the processes of journalism were still shrouded in mystery, had reason to suppose that she was somewhere in the Great Smoky Mountain when he had his next surprising encounter with her.

For once she was actually not in the forefront of his mind. He had been asked to usher at Veronique's wedding, set for mid-July, and the festivities in connection with this kept him preoccupied in almost every odd moment. Congress was no longer in session, so the capital was more or less drained of official society; but a ceaseless round of parties given by Mrs. Endicott's own important circle preceded the marriage. Bob was actually so hard-pressed for time that he had good reason to fear he might fail to turn up at the church ahead of the rest of the bridal party, as he had promised to do, to take a last look around and make sure that everything was in readiness for the ceremony; and when he put in his belated and breathless appearance, the sexton greeted him with an air of anxiety.

"I'm glad to see someone with authority, sir. I don't know just what to do about a lady that's here."

"What do you mean, a lady?"

"Well, sir, she slipped in soon after I opened up the church this morning, before it entered my head anyone would be here. I didn't

even see her when she came in. She was kneeling down when I first saw her, and she's been on her knees ever since. She's in very deep mourning. Every time I've gone near her I could hear her sobbing. I don't like to speak harshly, not to a lady that's in grief, like that, and getting some comfort out of her prayers. But Mrs. Endicott's orders were very strict. No one was to be admitted without a card, as you know, sir."

"Yes, I know. I'll go and speak to the lady. I'm sure I can put things to her in a nice way, so that she'll understand and go off quietly. She wouldn't want to stay for a wedding, anyhow, if she's in such deep mourning. I'm sure she doesn't know there's going to be one."

Bob walked firmly towards the third pew on the right, where the weeping widow had established herself. At his approach her sobs redoubled in volume. Bob began to be uncomfortable himself, and to feel a sympathetic understanding of the sexton's position. But he steeled himself to go on.

"Look here," he began sternly, clearing his throat.

The sobs ceased, and the veil which covered the weeper's face was slightly raised at one corner by unseen fingers. For a moment nothing more happened. Then Bob was aware of a muffled but familiar voice.

"Look here yourself. Be a good egg and let me stay. It's Zoe."

"What in the name of——"

"Hush. Don't give me away. Mr. Ruthven wanted a story on this wedding, a special angle. He asked Mrs. Endicott in a nice way to let him send a reporter—not me, just any reporter. And she wouldn't. So then he got mad and wired for me. He said he knew I'd get in somehow. You see, he's had experience with me himself."

"But——"

"Please, Bob. If you'll let me stay here now I'll make a date with you for tomorrow night."

"May I come to your apartment?"

"Would you rather do that than have dinner at some nice hotel?"

"You know darn well I would."

"All right—if you'll run along now."

The raised veil fell slowly back into place and the subdued sobs began again. Bob tiptoed down the aisle and rejoined the agitated sexton.

"It's all right. The lady's lost her card, but she's a distant relative. She got in on an early morning train and came straight to the church. She didn't care about going to a hotel, because she's leaving for the West again this afternoon. She's sure she can get over this crying spell before the ceremony starts. But, you see, she's just lost her own husband, and coming here, to a wedding, sort of brought things back."

The sexton nodded sympathetically. Bob drew a deep breath and began to run over his other prospective duties.

It was brazen, Helen told him, for him to go around grinning like a Cheshire cat all that day. Even if he wasn't sorry that Veronique was marrying someone else, he didn't need to act as if he was tickled to death about it. Helen so rarely reproached him for anything that ordinarily he would have taken great pains to speak to her soothingly and mollify her. But this time he hardly listened to her. His mind was on something else.

He sang in the shower as he made ready to keep his date. He sang while he dressed in fresh flannels and knotted a new necktie. He sang under his breath all the way from the Majestic, secure on its fashionable north-west hillside, to the drab little street in the south-east where Zoe's flat was located. He whistled as he ran up the steps and rang the bell.

There was no response. He waited a reasonable length of time, and rang again. There were six apartments in the building, each with a letter-box, push-bell and speaking-tube in the outer entrance; as he looked more closely he saw that there was no name in the little brass slot where Zoe's had formerly appeared, and that the names in all the others were strange to him. He went down the steps in a fury, and banged on the basement door. A decrepit negro janitor eventually opened it.

"No, sah, Miss Wing ain't heah," he drawled, in response to the question Bob barked out. "She done give up her quo'ters befo' she started fo' the South. I disremember exactly what she done tol' me, but she was sayin' somethin' about movin' when she got around to come back. Yes, sah, thank you, sah."

The thank you was purely force of habit. Bob did not tip the decrepit janitor, and his next error was to engage in a heated argument with a traffic officer over a little matter of speeding. The officer, unimpressed with Bob's Congressional licence plate—an accessory which had more than once caused him trouble before—gave him a ticket. By the time Bob reached the office of the *Examiner* the dog-day weather was responsible only in very small part for his heated condition.

The *Examiner* Building was noisy, dirty and filled with confusion, in the midst of which Bob found it hard to make anyone pay the slightest attention to him. In a shouting voice he demanded the privilege of being shown into Mr. Ruthven's private office and was belatedly told that Mr. Ruthven had gone out of town for the week-end. He next demanded Miss Wing's new address, and was told that she had not left it when she went out of town herself. The thought that the two might be out of town together flitted across Bob's frenzied fancy. Then he was ashamed of himself. Whatever else Zoe Wing might be, she was straight, as far as

her own personal conduct was concerned. If her journalistic methods were more devious, that was neither here nor there. Without wasting any time over reflection on these, Bob next inquired, a little more civilly, whether either Mrs. Fendall or Miss Bryant were in the building.

It transpired that Mrs. Fendall had just left for the evening, her "Advice to the Lovelorn" being completed for the day, but that Miss Bryant was still there as the Society Department closed late. Beyond the racket made by the presses, her gentle Southern accents floated out to him soothingly.

"Why, good-evenin', Mr. Morton; how've you ben? Anything I can do for you? Zoe told me how grand you were to her yesterday; we suttently do appreciate it around here. Why, she's leavin' again on a night plane. She has to get back to Tennessee as fast as ever she can now, seein' she stayed over a day, so there won't be any break in her series. I don't know why she isn't dead, the way she works. Oh, didn't you know? She's ben stayin' at the Powhatan while she's ben in town. I'm most certain you'd find her there still if you phoned her up."

Bob did not phone her up. He continued his mad dash across town, this time managing to avoid conflict with the law, and presented himself at the desk of the Powhatan in the same wrathful manner that he had entered the *Examiner* Building. The clerk on duty looked at him unmoved.

"I'm calling Miss Wing's room for you now, sir. No, she doesn't seem to answer. Would you care to have her paged? Well, you might find her on the roof garden."

The impassive clerk proved to be correct in his surmise. Zoe was finally discovered, quietly seated at a side-table set for two, which was close to the parapet overlooking the lighted city. She was bare-headed-and pleasingly dressed in sheer white. She looked cool, comfortable and contented, and she greeted Bob with an agreeable smile.

"I thought you might turn up here sooner or later. We've time for a meal and a dance before I take my plane."

"Why didn't you tell me you'd moved, you little hellcat?"

"Why in hell didn't you ask me, you big so-and-so? I suggested dinner at some nice hotel in the first place. But you were bound to go to my apartment. So I thought you might as well. I knew if you wanted to see me badly enough you'd find me eventually."

Apparently, for once, she was in no mood for a quarrel. Bob had never seen her when she seemed so tranquil. Even her profanity was tempered. She lighted a cigarette and leaned back in her chair, awaiting the arrival of the first course.

The Monument is mighty pretty from here tonight," she observed reflectively, gazing out in the general direction of it.

"You're mighty pretty yourself."

" 'The better to please you, sir, she said.' Incidentally I'm very pleased with *you*. That was certainly a good turn you did me yesterday. Have you seen my story?"

" Yes, and it was a darn good story, of its kind."

" Well, that's the kind I write. It was tough luck not to get a by-line on it, but of course I couldn't, under the circumstances. I did get double rates— Were you much shot up having Veronique Alfieri marry that souse?"

" Of course not. Why should I be? I'll admit Welby doesn't hold his liquor too well, but he isn't a bad fellow at that."

" It's been rumoured you had a fancy in the same direction he had. I thought he might have got in your way."

" No. I got in his way, a little, for a while. But there wasn't anything in it. I wasn't interested in going ahead."

" Why not?"

" I reckon you know the answer to that, don't you, without having me spell it out in words of one syllable?"

" I'm not so sure I do. Of course, I knew you wanted to have an affair with me, on the side. But I had the idea you wanted to marry Alfieri."

" Then you weren't using your head very well, for a smart girl. If you had been you'd have known I wanted to marry you, but that I thought I might have an affair with Veronique on the side!"

" Fruit cup? Shrimp cocktail?" inquired a waiter, balancing two plates precariously above their heads, with the inopportunity characteristic of hotel servants.

" The fruit cup goes here," Zoe said calmly, indicating the vacant place amidst the scattered silverware in front of her. Her moving hand shook a little, but Bob's eyes were unaccountably blurred and he did not see it.

" We'll tell you when we're ready for the next course," she went on. Then, as the waiter retreated, muttering something resentful and unintelligible, she continued, still calmly: " This isn't the time or the place for a proposal, Bob."

" But you never give me any time. Here you are going off on a plane tonight again! And I didn't choose the place. I told you all along I wanted to see you alone."

" Yes. But I didn't understand why. I'm sorry. You've put over a fast one on me this time, Bob."

" Well, you understand now. Will you let me come to your room after dinner and talk to you about it? Or will you go for a ride with me before you take your plane? For God's sake do something! And let's dance for a while now. Anything'll be better than sitting here shouting, with the table between us."

" I'm not shouting. I wish you wouldn't, either. I'm trying to think. And it's hard."

" Why?"

"Because I like you. I really like you a lot. But honestly, it never entered my head you wanted to marry me. And I hate like hell to say no."

"But you're not going to say no! Zoe, if you'd just come away from this darned roof garden with me——"

Eventually she did so. She actually permitted him, without protest, to accompany her to her room. The letter of the conventions meant nothing to her; it was only the elemental spirit of decency which concerned her. But once they were behind a closed door she managed to move away from him when he tried to put his arm around her. She did not shove him away or struggle against him, because she saw that was not necessary this time. She simply shook her head and smiled. Then, looking extremely tired, she sank into an easy-chair beside the one window and continued to gaze out at the monument.

"Listen," she said at last. "You put this crazy idea out of your head and we'll be good friends. I'm going away again tonight; you know that. But when I get back we can see quite a lot of each other, if you like, until I go away again."

"You're not going away *again*, are you? I mean after this time!"

"Yes, I am. I've got a contract. Not just an assignment, an honest-to-God contract. I'm going to take the jallopy to Europe with me. I'm going to cruise around over there. Anywhere I like. As long as I like. With all my expenses paid. Zoe and her Zephyr are out for fresh fields and pastures new. It's a big break. I wouldn't have got it, no matter how good the stuff I've been writing had been, unless I'd got my story at the wedding too. I'm awfully grateful to you, Bob."

"But where do I come in on this?"

"You don't come in. That is, I'm not going to Europe right away, when I get back from the South this fall. I've got another apartment all picked out. It covers a whole floor in one of those nice big old houses on Eye Street that have been made over. I'll have four rooms this time, three of them with fireplaces, a real kitchen, maybe a part-time maid. I've taken a year's lease and moved in the few things I have already. I want to get the feeling of a centre somewhere to come back to, no matter how much I'm away. I've never had a real home."

"But that's just what I want to give you, or share with you. Couldn't you make room for me in this centre of yours?"

She shook her head again. "You don't understand. I couldn't make room for any man there, not yet. I want to improve it first. I want to fix it up with new things, different from those I have now. Better and more beautiful. Lovely old furniture. Lovely soft rugs. Chintz on the sofas and knitted coverlets on the beds. Brass and

silver that shines. Candle-light and fire-light. Do you see what I mean?"

"But, Zoe, I didn't know you cared a hoot in hades about things of that sort!"

"We're surprising each other quite a lot this evening, aren't we? Of course I care. If I hadn't, I'd never have managed to make as much of the 'tenement'— You ought to have seen the shack I was born in! But that's beyond the point, just now. I didn't know you cared a hoot in hades about me either. At least, not in a way that would make me stop, look and listen. And I'm awfully sorry you do because——"

"But why *should* you be sorry?"

"Because I don't want to hurt your feelings. I like you a lot. I've told you that already. But I wouldn't marry you for anything."

"But *why not*, if you like me?"

"There're lots of reasons. I do like you, but I think you're sort of a light-weight. If I was going to marry a man, I'd want him to amount to something. And I'd want him to think that I amount to something."

"But I *do* think——"

"You think I'm smart. And you think I've got It. And you haven't had very good luck seeing much of me so far, and no luck at all with petting. You're sort of baffled and sort of mad and sort of intrigued all at once. It's got you foxed—foxed enough to make you propose, in a weak moment. But gosh, that doesn't mean anything! Why, some damn fool or other proposes to me about once a week!"

Bob, looking helplessly at Zoe Wing, realized her last remark was probably all too true. He made another futile gesture, and Zoe interrupted him again.

"When I said I'd want him to think I amounted to something, I meant a lot more than that. I'd want his father and mother to feel it was a swell match, the way they would've if he'd married a girl like Alfieri. I'd want his sister to be pleased and proud to have me for her best friend. I'd want him to think I was the very best in my line—as a reporter, I mean, and as a person, too. A writer whose name stood for something and a great lady into the bargain."

"But someday, Zoe, it will be like that! Someday my father and mother and sister will feel that way. And someday you will be a great journalist and a great lady."

"Very well. When all that comes true, I will marry you—if you amount to anything yourself by that time!"

"Is—is that a promise, Zoe?"

"With all those ifs tied to it? No, of course not."

"Will you make it into a promise by-and-by?"

"I don't know. Maybe. I reckon so. Yes."

She rose quickly, and of her own accord flung her arms around

his neck. For an instant she stood, locked in his embrace and returning his kisses, her body unresisting, her face unaverted. Then she withdrew from him, gently, but with the same swiftness that she had gone to him.

"It's time for me to take my plane," she said softly. "Let me go, Bob. If you try to stop me now, it'll be the end of everything. I'd never come back to you, that way, again."

Bob Morton knew that she was telling the truth. That was why he did not try to stop her, either then or later, or to hold her to him in any way. He did not hear from her again until she came back from the South, weeks after he had expected her, on the very eve of Helen's *début*; and that same night she told him she was going to Europe almost right away after all—just as soon as she could get her passport and the necessary papers for her car and a few letters of introduction. He saw her frequently during the next month, which she spent in her new apartment, less sketchily than most persons would have done with the prospect of being there so short a time. She had picked up a few attractive and authentic antiques, during her rambles through out-of-the-way places in the South, and she amused herself and him by trying the effect of these, variously disposed in the spacious old rooms she had acquired, and by quietly eliminating part of the "junk" which had scantily furnished the "tenement." Now that she had something better to take its place she wanted to be completely rid of it, she said. She told Bob she was planning to pick up other pieces, here and there, in Europe; she understood that England was pretty well combed already, but that there were parts of rural France which were a regular field for treasure trove. She hoped to pick up the language, too; probably antique shops were as good a place as any to practise it in, except restaurants, and inns. She meant to make a thorough survey of those for ideas in both cuisine and atmosphere. She meant to go to plays also, and operas; yes, and to picture galleries. She didn't think they'd bore her, after the first time. She thought she'd learn to enjoy them, and that indirectly they'd help her along with her career; you never knew when knowledge about that highbrow sort of thing might come in handy——

She talked about all this readily enough, while the part-time maid, who had also become a reality, served supper. Zoe preferred, evidently, to discuss the professional future, which was opening up before her in such a promising way, to anything else. But Bob did succeed, one evening when he caught her in a mellow mood, in getting her to solve a riddle that had long been puzzling him.

"Zoe—tell me something."

"Reporters never give away secrets. Haven't you found that out?"

"No, but seriously—— What became of you that night at Fort Myer when I thought the sidewalk had swallowed you up?"

Zoe gave a reminiscent chuckle. "Oh—*that*! Why, the Commandant's car was parked just outside the Riding Hall. I said something in a brief aside to the sentry and dove in, that's all."

"You must've said something pretty powerful. He stared at me with a poker face, when I came out myself, about two seconds after you— And where, might I ask, did you go the day you lit out of Dad's office in such a seething rage?"

"You were in a seething rage yourself or you'd have guessed. Into Senator Hyde's office right next to it, of course. It was as simple as going through a revolving door."

"I see. And now that you're in a mood for confessions, you might tell me where you went the night of the Navy Relief Ball when you disappeared from the floor."

"I went home with Captain Arnold for midnight supper— Oh, don't look like that, you old sourpuss! That lovely Mrs. Windsor and Helen and Alfredo and Bert Scruggs and I all went. Captain Arnold suggested it while I was dancing with him and I thought it was quite a good idea. Say, have you ever seen *his* house? Now that is my idea of something—"

Zoe was off again, on the subject of interior decorating. Her own setting became increasingly attractive every day, her own suppers better and better planned and served. Bob was included now in all the parties she gave, to which an increasing number of officials intermittently came. He himself was accepted as one of her own gang, which included Brenda Bryant, Lisa Fendall, Bert Scruggs and several other reporters, who were all regularly present. But he almost never saw her alone, which was apparently not by accident. On the rare occasions when they were by themselves, she did not refer to the scene in the Powhatan in any way, and something told him it would be wiser if he did not do so either.

He went up to New York to see her off, and found her berth piled high with flower boxes and her cabin crowded with visitors. The atmosphere was smoke-laden, and there was a constant refilling of glasses from two siphons and four bottles that were lodged upon ice in the washbasin. Nobody seemed sorry that Zoe was going away. Everyone was in hilarious spirits, everyone was congratulating her on her good luck and wishing her well. For the most part, the crowd consisted of other reporters, of both sexes. But just before the gong sounded, a tall man whose difference in type made itself instantly felt, loomed up in the doorway, and Bob saw with amazement that it was Giles Arnold.

"I hope I'm not intruding, Miss Wing," he said agreeably, with a slight bow. "I just happened to see your name in the slot outside your door, and I couldn't resist the temptation of letting you know I was crossing on this ship, too. My cabin's across the corridor. I've just been appointed Naval Attaché in Paris. Why, hello, Morton, it's nice to see you! I'm glad I got in that dinner for your

sister before I left Washington—it was the last party I managed to give!”

General introductions of the most hearty sort ensued and Captain Arnold accepted a couple of drinks which were most cordially offered. When he rose to leave, saying he had other friends to see before the boat sailed, he threw out a passing suggestion.

“By the way, the Captain tells me he’s got a spare seat, for a lady, at his table. Could we persuade you to take it, Miss Wing? And if you’d care to come up on the bridge while we’re going out of the harbour, it would give him and me both great pleasure. Fine! And don’t worry about your steamer chair, I’ll see to that. Oh, thanks very much! I’ll have one more then I really must get along. But I’ll be back in half an hour, if that’s all right. We’ll be shoving off by then——”

Zoe seemed to think this would be all right, in fact very pleasant, and the congratulations of her cronies redoubled, in number and intensity, not to say ribaldry, as Captain Arnold departed. At last, propelled by a desperate steward, they began to leave her cabin, but they kept coming back, for one more joke and one more drink. Bob, with increasing hopelessness, realized that his last chance of seeing her alone was fading fast. But just before the boat sailed, she kissed him again, drawing him back into her cabin after he had already left it and turning the key in the lock. Someone else came and knocked on the door, but if Zoe heard it, she paid no attention to it. And Bob never felt certain that she did hear it. He knew that, for one brief moment, only he in all the world held reality for her. Then the moment passed, and he was bereft more bitterly than ever before. He still seemed to feel the stinging sweetness of the kiss which was also a challenge, he still seemed to see the dazzling whiteness of the lovely flesh which sheathed a valiant spirit. But with this memory was mingled the knowledge that Giles Arnold was on the ship and that he himself had been left behind.

After all, what was there that he could confide to Helen?

PART III

CHAPTER VI

THERE was nothing about life in the country which appealed to Veronique.

She had never realized this when she went to Hunter's Green for week-ends. The house-parties there were made up of gay groups, averaging from twenty to thirty persons, and they amused themselves in much the same way that they did in the town. To be sure, there were sometimes a few who went mooning around the house to rave about its architecture and its antiques, who rambled through the gardens and the orchards or made daily inspections of the stables and kennels, and who preferred cross-country riding to dancing, gambling and even flirting and drinking. But these were idiosyncrasies which had never inconvenienced Veronique in the least; there were always plenty of people left who, like herself, wanted to play cards, to "trip the light fantastic," and to lounge in front of the gun-room fire or on the wide gallery in congenial company. The first time that she and Welby and Candace Hunter, who had by this time become her mother-in-law, were left alone in the great echoing house on a rainy Monday evening, Veronique was aghast to find that after dinner there was nothing to do but go to bed.

Candace Hunter, who was a good-natured woman as long as no one crossed her or inconvenienced her, called up several of her neighbours in an effort to remedy the situation. But one telephone line was out of order, and the road was in bad condition in a long driveway, and in a third household everyone was down with the 'flu. All other nearby places were closed. Candace shrugged her plump shoulders and poured out another drink for herself. She was still a very handsome woman in an overblown sort of way; the blonde beauty which had once made her the toast of two counties and several cities had survived, to a remarkable degree, the ravages made by time, indolence and liquor; and the velvet hostess dress she was wearing, though no longer very fresh, suited her in style and texture and in its dusty rose colour. In the dim light, to an unprejudiced observer, she would have appeared both regal and seductive. To her daughter-in-law she merely looked heavy, frowsy and vulgar, and her easy drawl, generally characterized as delightful, was provoking in its placidity.

"I reckon it's no use," she said, with no deep concern in her throaty voice. "Everyone else lives too far away, and it is raining

cats and dogs. You better make the best of it, Ronnie. After all, you may as well get used to it first as last. It's like this nine-tenths of the time in winter. Jett Dabney and Stewart Bainbridge generally drop in two or three times a week. I'm looking for Jett almost any minute. But he hates cards like a cat hates water and Stewart's got business that takes him North every now and then. At least he says it's business that takes him. He's in New York now."

Jett Dabney and Stewart Bainbridge were local squires who were among Mrs. Hunter's most devoted beaux. Veronique had become accustomed, in the course of her week-end visits at Hunter's Green, to seeing them generally in evidence. She was not concerned, or even unduly curious, regarding the degree of intimacy which they enjoyed with her mother-in-law, though she had heard numerous speculations, some of them less charitable than others, voiced on the subject by her grandmother and her grandmother's two great friends, Mrs. Rutherford and Mrs. Burgess. Privately, however, she thought both men as dull as dish-water and could not understand why Mrs. Hunter tolerated their constant presence. They never seemed to volunteer entertainment in any form on their own initiative; only to take the Hunter hospitality for granted as unlimited. After she and her husband had gone to their own room that dreary autumn evening, Veronique asked Welby, with scorn, if soaks and spongers were characteristic of the locality.

"I should think your mother would want her heavy suitors to send her presents once in a while, or take her into town to a show, or at least invite her to dinner at their places for a change," she observed rather petulantly. "It wouldn't interest me to have a man around all the time who was just a hanger-on."

"Oh, they're nice old boys. You'll get used to them. I like them a lot better myself than those sleek, foreign muffin-hounds Mother always has on hand in Washington. That Italian attaché, Fopiano, for instance. If ever a man was well-named, he is. I'm sure he dyes his moustache and wears corsets."

"I'm sure he doesn't. Just because he isn't sloppy, like you, that's what you'd think. Incidentally, you seem to forget that I'm a foreigner myself."

"Nonsense! Your mother was an American and you've married a Virginian. You'll live down the Corsican tradition in no time now."

"Thanks. I've never had the slightest desire to 'live it down,' as you call it. I'm proud of it. I wish I were on a boat bound for Corsica this minute. I suppose we can't very well go back to Europe this winter when we've just come from there. But I think we'd better plan to get into Washington right away."

"I thought I told you before. I want to spend the winter here."

"You know darn well you never told me anything of the kind! You've spent the winters in Washington ever since I've known you!

It never entered my head you'd even think of doing anything else. What's the use of having a huge house there if you don't use it?"

"The house is rented, furnished, to Senator and Mrs. Hyde. I must've forgotten to tell you that, too. You see——" Welby fumbled a little, both in his speech and with the garment he was removing. He had consumed a good many highballs that evening, which was his method, like his mother's, of making sure that time would never hang heavy on his hands. They did not make him violent or quarrelsome unless he mixed his drinks, and this he had been careful not to do ever since the previous summer. They only made him feel comfortably drowsy and agreeably amorous. All he wanted to do now was to get into his great soft tester bed as soon as possible and hold Veronique easily in his arms until he drifted off to sleep. He did not want to start an argument with her, and he did not want to tell her, brutally, that now he had achieved his purpose in securing a rich wife there was no longer any reason for him to leave Hunter's Green, which he loved, for Washington, which he loathed. He was really very fond of Veronique, and this he felt was fortunate because, considering the state of his finances, he would have been impelled to marry her, if he could get her, whether he was or not; it was pleasanter all around that he had really wanted her.

"You've tricked me into this and you know it! I'd never have married you if I'd known you expected me to bury myself down here in this dump!"

"It's not a dump!" Welby retorted indignantly. He was really hurt, for his love of the land, and all that land of his own meant to him, went deeper than anything else in his nature. "It's one of the most beautiful places in Virginia. Most girls would be proud of a chance to live here. Every Hunter has brought his bride home to live!"

"Well, maybe they've all done it on false pretences, the way you did!"

"Stop talking to me like that! If you don't, I'm likely to remind you that you were darn glad to marry me and why!"

He was thoroughly roused from his good-natured drowsiness by this time. A century earlier, one of the hard-riding, hard-drinking ancestors whom he so greatly resembled would, in the same mood, have unhesitatingly beaten his bride. Welby had sense enough to know that he could not attempt anything of the sort with impunity, but the knowledge was regretful and his clenched fists and ugly expression betrayed this. In the face of his outburst and his gesture, Veronique remained bound by no inhibitions whatsoever. She picked up a small paper-cutter that was lying on the desk between them and threw it at him.

Before he could dodge it had grazed his cheek and ear; then it

glanced past him and drove into the wall beyond, quivering like a miniature dagger as it stuck there. Bellowing with rage and fright, Welby instinctively put his hand to his face and drew it away again, red and wet. The next instant he was gripping Veronique's arm, smearing it with his own blood, which she had drawn. She looked at him mockingly and entirely unafraid.

"Perhaps now you'll believe I haven't outgrown my Corsican habits after all," she said in a taunting voice. "You better remember it in the future too. I might aim closer the next time."

The traditional bride of Hunter's Green, having first been beaten into submission by her lord and master, had afterwards accepted his ardent advances without troublesome resistance. Indeed, her subjugation was by then so complete that further force was superfluous; and though a bridegroom sometimes applied it, this was only for effect; actually he was able to take unopposed and unstinted advantage of her supine state. But Welby, lying on the extreme edge of the tester bed, and separated from his wife by its immense width, ruefully reflected, as he nursed his cheek in the darkness, that it would have been safer for him to touch a tigress than to attempt loving conciliation with Veronique in her present mood. His anger had subsided as swiftly as it had been roused; he was ashamed of his unchivalrous speech and his still more unchivalrous action. But he did not dare to reveal his remorse; he lay wretched and wakeful, but motionless, throughout the long night. At last, when the cold reluctant daylight began to creep into the room, he turned over, cautiously, to look at Veronique, and saw that his gripping fingers had left hideous black and blue marks on her beautiful white arm. His heart smote him afresh.

"Ronnie!" he said under his breath. "Honey—are you awake? Please listen to me!"

She gave no sign that she had heard him, and as he continued to gaze at her, in a mournful manner, he could not help considering that her appearance, as well as her attitude, was fantastic. The quocile consorts of tradition had worn nightrobes of the finest and snowiest lawn, exquisitely embroidered by nuns, who for some mysterious reason were regarded as especially fitted to fashion bridal raiment, in spite of their own celibate lives. Moreover, these shrinking spouses had never stirred from under the sheets without seeking to shield themselves from their husband's eyes in pastel coloured dressing-gowns of china silk or cashmere, daintily feather-stitched and scalloped, which, however soft and delicate, was opaque. Veronique's trousseau had not contained a single garment of either sort. She slept in chiffon, frequently black chiffon; but on this occasion it happened to be scarlet instead. She had pushed her coverings aside, and lay with every line of her figure revealed, her skin shining through the vivid transparency with which she

was so lightly veiled. In the dim room, against the white bed-linen, she looked like a living flame, dangerous to the point of deadliness, but irresistibly alluring.

Intermittently, for two hours, Welby kept on speaking to her in fond and repentant tones, without receiving any answer. Finally he rose, as quietly as possible, and went into the bathroom to dress. When he returned to the great bedchamber it was empty. The red robe, twisting across the bed, no longer looked like a flame; it looked like a scarlet snake. Welby shrank from the sight of it. He went quickly downstairs, and having made a hurried survey of the rooms on the ground floor and found these empty also, he skirted the stables, which he knew Veronique hated, and headed towards the garage. Two of its doors were open, and he entered it just in time to see Veronique sliding into the seat of her roadster.

"Please, honey," he said again, reaching for her hand. "I'm mighty sorry I said what I did. And I wouldn't have hurt you for the world. You know that. Say you forgive me, won't you? Then let's forget all about last night, and start over again. I promise you I'll do better from now on."

"I wish you'd get out of my way. I want to start the car. I'm driving to Washington."

"I'll take you to Washington, if you want to go. But let's have some breakfast first. We'll both feel better when we've got something beneath the belt."

"I don't want you to take me to Washington. I'm sick of the sight of you. And I don't want any breakfast. Is it still necessary to keep telling you that? I've got something beneath the belt all the time. That's why I don't want any breakfast. I shouldn't think you'd have to be reminded. Especially as you reminded me last night."

"Ronnie, you know you ought not to drive a car that distance now."

"Oh, so you do remember after all? Well, I'm going to drive a car. All the time. The only reason I'm not going to ride all the time, too, is because I loathe horses. You know that. But I'm going to do everything else. What difference does it make?"

"It makes a lot of difference to me. You know how badly I feel—about what happened in the beginning. I never would've done it if I hadn't mixed my drinks. I've never mixed drinks since."

"That's locking the stable door after the horse is stolen, isn't it? Or perhaps I should say closing the gates after the wood colt is bred. You see, I'm learning the slogans of your lovely hunt country."

"Don't, Veronique. You make me feel worse and worse. What I started to say was, I—I'm very pleased, in spite of everything, about—— That is, I'm looking forward—— It will be no end of fun——"

"I don't think much of your ideas of fun. I'm going to start this car now, Welby, whether you get out of the way or not. So if you don't want to be killed——"

Driving with savage speed which she accelerated, out of spite, at every "horse crossing," Veronique went over the road to Washington in an incredibly short time. Mrs. Endicott, who was not an early riser, was still sitting propped up with pillows, balancing a tray on her knees and reading her morning mail, when her granddaughter burst unceremoniously into her room. The dowager's hair was already done for the day by the hairdresser who always came to her punctually at nine, for her personal maid, though adroit in all other respects, was clumsy about coiffures. She had also bathed, to a certain extent, from her basin, being one of those women who persistently cling to sponge baths in the face of modern plumbing; and her quilted satin bed-sacque was spotless. Nevertheless, in spite of her impeccable appearance, she was annoyed at the inconvenient effrontery of her granddaughter's visit; and her resentment, evident from the start, increased rapidly as she learned the purpose of it.

"Really, Veronique, I think you must have taken leave of your senses! I have told you repeatedly that nothing would induce me to let you touch your principal. Why you should come rushing down here from the country to start plaguing me about it, all over again, when you know there's not the slightest use, I can't imagine!—— Will you please pull down that shade a little, my dear? I always say there's nothing like a south-east bedroom—in fact, I wouldn't consent to one with any other exposure. But really, there's almost too much sunshine coming in across the bed."

Veronique arose, sullenly, and jerked down the shade. Then she resumed both her seat and her argument. Her grandmother interrupted her a second time.

"Veronique, your posture is very offensive to me. I can see above your knees when you cross your limbs like that. Now that you are a married woman I really think that you might wear your skirts a little longer."

"I haven't got but one skirt on," Veronique retorted. "And this knitted stuff always slides up. I don't see what that's got to do with what we were talking about anyway. I don't believe Grandpa ever meant me to be broke all the time."

"Your grandfather was an extremely capable man. I respected him greatly, and with reason. But his will was not a wise one. It gave your mother complete control of her inheritance. Your father, who was a spendthrift, dissipated most of it. She safeguarded you from a similar experience by leaving what she herself managed to salvage for you in trust. I should be breaking faith with the dead if I failed to abide by her prudent provisions."

Veronique, without uncrossing her legs, lighted a cigarette. She knew that smoke was offensive to her grandmother, especially in a bedroom, but she went uncompromisingly on.

"I wish you wouldn't talk in such a lofty strain. Noble sentiments are so terribly boring," she remarked, flicking ashes on to the carpet. "After all, it isn't necessary that you should break Mother's will, if you have so many scruples about it—or even if you just think that the legal difficulties would be a nuisance to you. You could give me an allowance yourself. You'd never miss a thousand a month. If I had that, I'd be quite comfortable, with the income from Mother's money besides."

"A thousand a month!" gasped Mrs. Endicott. Her unfeigned horror was so great that she endangered the balance of her tray, which stood on little folding legs and was at best precariously placed.

"Why, yes. You have more money than you know what to do with."

"No woman has more money than she knows what to do with," Mrs. Endicott responded, with injured dignity. "Will you please call Jeanne, Veronique. There is no use in trying to go on drinking my coffee or reading my mail while you argue with me in this ill-bred and unreasonable fashion—— Jeanne, take away this tray and put my letters on my desk. And tell Ernest I shall need him at twelve. You may return at eleven-thirty to help me dress—— You are very much mistaken, Veronique, in assuming that I am so wealthy," she went on, when the maid had left the room. "As a matter of fact, my income is barely adequate for my own needs. Greystone Towers is an expensive establishment to keep up. Not that I live in the least ostentatiously. I was at Mrs. Burgess' house last evening—a dinner in honour of the Vice-President—and she used a complete service, for sixty, made of silver gilt. Moreover, orchids were scattered so profusely from one end of the table to the other that you could hardly see the cloth, which was made of *Pointe de Venice*. Now if I entertained on that scale——"

"You entertain on the scale that suits you. Mrs. Burgess doesn't get out that famous silver gilt service of hers more than once or twice a year. You have parties with red silk puffs instead of orchids, but you have them two or three times a week."

"Veronique, I shall be obliged to ask you to open the window. The room is becoming extremely close. Thank you—— May I ask what moved you to come here, at this particular time, to make such extraordinary requests along with so many personal remarks?"

"I just found out that Welby and his mother have rented their town house to Senator and Mrs. Hyde. I didn't know a thing about it beforehand. I can't stay stuck in the country all winter. I want to rent a house myself. A smaller one would do. Or even an apartment."

"I should think you would be delighted to remain in the country. A bride usually enjoys seclusion with her husband. And Hunter's Green is not only a beautiful place; it is a valuable piece of property. I am not surprised that Welby wishes to look after it himself. It shows a very proper spirit on his part."

"He's welcome to stay there if he wants to. I don't—— If you won't let me have any money for an apartment, you might at least let me come here and stay with you for part of the winter."

"Without your husband?"

"I don't know. I suppose so, unless later on he wanted to come too. Mrs. Hunter's going to stay with friends—a succession of them, I mean—through the season. She says she 'has enough visits to last her,' whatever that may mean. She pretends to be crazy about Hunter's Green, but I don't believe she likes it a bit better than I do. I bet she'll be striking for town herself within another week, especially if it keeps on raining, and Stewart Bainbridge stays on in New York."

"Veronique, you puzzle me more and more every minute. Are you playing some sort of a trick to persuade me to receive first you and then your husband, too, as guests for a prolonged period? Have you reason to believe that the Hunters are financially embarrassed, that they have rented their town house because of necessity? If this is the case, I certainly shall not consent to any such plan as you suggest. It would be only the beginning of indefinite imposition. I am more than ever convinced that your mother was wise in tying up her money! And I certainly shall not consent to having mine squandered, as hers was, by a profligate young man."

"I'm not up to any sort of a trick. I do think the Hunters are hard up. But they're not trying to sponge on you. They didn't know I was going to ask you to take me in and, as a matter of fact, I don't think Welby'd especially want to come here. If you want to know the plain truth, it's that I'd be glad of an excuse to get away from him."

"Why, it's only a few months since you married him!"

"It seems about a hundred years. Be a good sport, Grandma. Let me come here and stay until after New Year's, anyhow."

"I never heard of anything so preposterous in my life. What is the matter? Is Welby drinking to excess? Is he abusing you?"

It would have been easy enough to say yes. Indeed, without saying anything, Veronique could have shown Mrs. Endicott her arm, and her grandmother would have accepted the evidence, with horror, as sufficient. She did not understand, herself, what quality of latent loyalty it was that kept her silent. But the silence was eloquent, too.

"Very well," Mrs. Endicott said stiffly. "If you're actually unhappy with your husband, I am willing that you should return to
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Greystone Towers for a visit, during the course of which we can discuss the future. But it is too soon for you to do so now. It would cause comment. You may come in the spring."

"It'll be too late then for me to have any fun. I'm going to have a baby in the spring."

"*You're going to have a baby in the spring!* What part of the spring?"

"I don't know exactly. Well, early. I'm lucky that I don't show it so far."

"You're lucky that you don't *show it so far!* Why, you couldn't possibly show it yet! Veronique Alfieri, what are you trying to tell me?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything. I think the less I tell you the better, don't you? Then you can tell your evil-minded old cronies, with a clear conscience, that you don't know."

Veronique got up abruptly and pushed back her chair. Her grandmother, looking at her with reluctant fascination, failed to discover any change in her figure as she came nearer, except that its lovely curves seemed slightly accentuated, and, therefore, more alluring than ever. There was hardly any change in her colour either. It was high and clear, as it always had been; but it had a richer bloom than ever before. She had always been beautiful; now she looked magnificent. But she looked menacing, too. The formidable woman entrenched among her pillows actually shrank away from her approach.

"I can just see Mrs. Rutherford and Mrs. Burgess counting on their fingers," Veronique said scornfully. "And saying, 'Now let me *see*, Marcia. It was in *July* that dear little Veronique was married, wasn't it? The very *end* of July?' Well, you can be terribly surprised at the news. You better be, or Mrs. Rutherford will have me clapped into that Home for Fallen Girls she's always begging for, when you go there for a party, and Mrs. Burgess will get out the silver gilt again, to make as much of a show as she can when she passes on the sensational tidings. You can begin now to think up a story about some kind of an accident that brought on premature labour and all that stuff. You can say it was a seven months' baby, that it didn't have any fingernails or eyelashes or whatever it is babies don't have when they really do come too soon. I'd have let you believe it had, too, if you'd been decent about the money. I wouldn't have let you get all hot and bothered about it. But I think it serves you right to tell you the truth."

She paused for a moment, but only to come a little closer. Mrs. Endicott shrank still further back into the pillows, only thankful that there was no papercutter about.

"I didn't want to marry Welby Hunter," Veronique went on relentlessly. "I wanted to marry Bob Morton. I might've managed it, too, if I'd played my cards a little better. But I played them darn

poorly. I was sore at Bob, and I thought it might make him jealous if I went in for heavy petting with Welby. I was a fool. Bob didn't care a rap how heavy it was. He's never cared about anything or anybody except that devilish red-headed reporter who double-crossed you, not from the first moment he laid eyes on her. My looks didn't make a bit of difference or my money either. What he likes is her sense and her spirit. I didn't have any sense at all, or much of any spirit. And so I got into this mess. I don't blame Welby especially. It was as much my fault as it was his. I knew better than to go wandering off in the woods with him when he'd had too many drinks."

Again Veronique did not know herself why she should have taken the trouble to shield Welby in any way. But for the second time some protective instinct made her do it.

"I suppose by-and-by I'll get used to him. I do get awfully fed up with him, though, down there in the country, where there isn't a thing on earth to do. And last night I got mad at him. I threw a paper-cutter at him. It's a wonder I didn't put one of his eyes out. This morning he was sorry——"

"He was sorry——"

"Yes. Because he'd been mad, too, and jeered at me. Oh, it was just one of those things. A general mess. He really was sorry this morning, though, and wanted to make up. But I wouldn't. I was bound to run off to town. Now that I'm here I feel a lot better. And I think if I could just stay for a while and get straightened out—I won't let you down, Grandma, honestly I won't. I was only joking when I said I would. I'll go back to the country before anyone has a chance to suspect."

"I shall certainly not let you stay here for a while. I shall not let you stay here at all. I'm amazed that you should suggest such a thing. After this sordid, vulgar story you have just told me! The mere fact that you should make such a request is a shameless piece of effrontery. But I suppose I could expect nothing else from your father's daughter!"

It had always been Mrs. Endicott's custom, when she wished to rebuke Veronique, to tell her that she was exactly like her father. The girl had adored him, and still vividly recalled him as a dashing and romantic figure, while her nondescript mother had faded into the dim recesses of her memory. She had always been hurt by her grandmother's mode of attack, but she had never known that the hurt was intentional. Now she saw that it always had been, that her grandmother hated her and was glad of a chance to wound her. She was cut to the quick by the sudden knowledge. Mrs. Endicott, aware that she had dealt a deadly blow, and taking grim satisfaction in this, drew herself erect, disregarding her pillows. With her well-dressed hair and imperious features she managed to look magisterial, in spite of the quilted bed-jacket, and she went on

speaking with righteous indignation, her fury overcoming her fright.

"I suppose it is too much, in this day and age, to expect gratitude from anyone!" she said in a withering voice which gathered intensity as she spoke. "I suppose the fact that I have given you a good home and a good education—every social and cultural advantage—means nothing to you at all. I always feared that it might not, and I might have saved myself the trouble I have taken. But I did think I could at least count upon you to repay me by learning to behave with something approaching common decency. I see that was too much to expect also. You are a product of your terrible Corsican background. You stand there, shamelessly, talking to me about 'wandering off in the woods' with a drunkard. You ask me to take you into my house after such an act of degradation—to jeopardize my own position for your sake—a position which has taken me a long time to achieve. How do I know that this—this would not actually be born here?"

"Why don't you say it, Grandma? It's a good old honest English word! In the Valley he'd have been called a wood colt instead. Only he won't be one—he'll be the noble scion of a great family, renowned for brave men and chaste women. Because I'm married to his father now. And he won't be born in your house. He'll be born in the ancestral manor at Hunter's Green. I'll take good care of that! And I'll take good care, too, that you never see him—or me either again! Not if you beg for me on your deathbed! You needn't worry about your position! It's secure now—thanks to my father's title! If it hadn't been for that, people would still be talking about your striking arrival in Washington with most of your money tied up in red flannel socks! It took a coronet in the family to make them forget about that, and you know it. That is why you moved heaven and earth to marry your poor, plain, spineless daughter to a foreign nobleman. A count from Corsica looked pretty good to you then. But everyone's forgotten now, so you're safe. Keep your stuffy old position. I don't want it. I've got one of my own that's much better. I'm a countess in my own right, and I'm the wife of the master of Hunter's Green and the mother of its heir besides. You can have your shoddy borrowed place all to yourself!"

She was so seething with fury and had flung herself out of the house so fast that it was not until she had released her brake and started her car that it occurred to Veronique to wonder what she had better do next. She recoiled from the thought of returning, after all, to Virginia; but there was nothing to take her in the opposite direction, and she suddenly seemed to have lost all desire for wild and reckless driving. On the other hand, she could not remain, even temporarily, in the driveway at Greystone Towers. As

she looked about her, still distractedly, her eyes inevitably fell upon the adjacent Majestic Apartments, and she thought of Helen Morton.

If she could find Helen at home, and alone, nothing could possibly be better. And the chances were good that she might. Senator Morton and Bob were, of course, both on the Hill at this hour. Mrs. Morton was probably engaged with a committee meeting of some organization or other. But if Helen had been to a party the night before, as was also likely, she had probably slept late and would not be going out until luncheon time. Veronique parked her car again, this time in front of the Majestic. Then she inquired at the desk. The answer was what she had hoped. Senator and Mrs. Morton and Mr. Robert Morton were all out, but Miss Morton was in, and would be glad to see Mrs. Hunter. Would Mrs. Hunter please go right up? Two minutes later Veronique was sitting in the Mortons' stereotyped living-room, facing Helen from the vantage-point of the mohair sofa, while Helen herself curled up on one of the tapestry chairs.

It was amazing how Helen had improved and developed, Veronique thought haphazardly, as she sat, smoking one cigarette after another, and trying to focus her ideas upon some definite plan of action. Of course, Helen had always been very pretty and very sweet; but she had been such a shy, dowdy little thing at first. Now she had poise and a definite style of her own, and she was usually so radiantly and transparently happy that this was an attraction in itself. It was some time before Veronique, in her abstraction, noticed that Helen did not look as happy as usual this morning. In fact, she did not look happy at all. She was composed and she was courteous, but she was also very quiet, and finally Veronique recognized a lurking element of trouble in the quietness. She roused herself from her own biting problems and spoke to Helen sympathetically.

"There's nothing wrong, is there, sweetness? Boy friend all right and everything?"

Zoe's nickname for Helen had spread into general usage, and Alfredo's suit was also a matter of general acceptance. Veronique did not mean to be either impertinent or prying in speaking as she did. She was surprised to see that Helen's lips trembled a little when she answered.

"No, there's nothing really wrong. Alfredo's parents have been here for a visit."

"The good old Spanish custom of sizing up the son and heir's lady-love?"

"Yes. That is what it was, Ronnie."

"But, sweetness, don't talk as if you'd lost your last friend! They must have taken a tumble for you right away!"

"I think they did like me. They acted as if they did. And the

Mexican Ambassador was very kind. He gave a beautiful party and invited us all to come to it, so that Father and Mother could meet Alfredo's parents under the most pleasant auspices. It was really lovely. But after that the Terrazas came to call. In a very formal way. They wore the deepest black——"

"But, sweetness, that doesn't mean anything. Latins are always winding themselves up in *crêpe* if a third cousin or someone like that up and dies. People do it in Corsica, too. They've a regular cult of the dead there."

"Yes, I know. It was only Señora Terraza's great-aunt this time, her grandmother's half-sister. But the effect was depressing. Father was not in, or Bob. It wouldn't have been so bad if they had been. Of course, they never are on weekday afternoons, and Alfredo knows this. I think he tried to explain to his parents beforehand. But they came, just the same, and I think they still expected to find Father here, more or less awaiting their visit. Mother did all the talking. She told the Terrazas she had been to Mexico once on an eight-day tour with the Woman's Club of Mortonville and other affiliated organizations. Alfredo had never heard about this tour; I tried to keep him from hearing. Because Mother didn't like Mexico at all. She said it was simply overrun with beggars and lottery-ticket vendors and that they kept her from seeing anything she might possibly have enjoyed. She was sure they'd give her some terrible sickness, or at least fleas. As a matter of fact, she was sick. The food poisoned her, or the altitude affected her, or something. She said the food was awful, too, but I can't see that this was the beggars' fault. She didn't eat any of their food. I don't suppose they had any. A great many of the club ladies were sick, and their sickness interfered with their schedule. They couldn't do Cuernavaca and Taxco all in one day, as they had planned. And it rained when they went to Xochimilco. She told the Terrazas she didn't understand how anyone could bear to live in Mexico. I could see she hurt their feelings terribly."

"Well, I should think she might have."

"Of course, it is their home, so they think it is beautiful. And I wouldn't have minded whether it was beautiful or not. Because if—if you care about a man you don't, do you, if that is where he wants to live? And you're apt to agree with him anyhow, aren't you?"

Veronique, recalling how she had talked about Hunter's Green as a dump to Welby, felt a strange pang of contrition shoot through her at Helen's unsuspecting words. Fortunately, Helen went on talking before she was obliged to answer.

"But the Terrazas persevered. I believe they thought Mother would return their call, but after a few days, since she had not, Señor Terraza went to call on Father at the Senate Office Building. Bob was obliged to keep Señor Terraza waiting for quite a few minutes in the outer office because, when he got there, a very

important person named Mr. Puffleberger was already in the private office with Father."

"Mr. Puffleberger!"

"Yes. He's connected with some of the big Western breweries in a way that isn't quite clear to me. Do you suppose he's what might be called a lobbyist?"

"Very likely."

"Well, anyway, he stayed and stayed, and it seems there are reasons—those aren't very clear to me, either—why Bob felt Father shouldn't be interrupted while he was there. But at last he left, and then Bob went with Señor Terraza into Father's office, and Señor Terraza asked Father formally for my hand on behalf of his son. It seems that is the way a proposal of marriage is always made in that family. They think it is the only proper way. That is the reason Alfredo hadn't asked me himself. At least—not exactly."

"Well, but then why isn't everything hunky-dory now?"

"Because Father said no. He said he couldn't let his only daughter marry a Mexican. You see, Mother had kept talking to him. She had told him that Latin women were very ignorant and backward and superstitious. I think she convinced him that Señora Terraza hardly knew how to write her own name, and that she never stirred out of her own house except to go to church. She is very grave, Ronnie, and very devout, but she's lovely to look at and has beautiful gentle manners. Alfredo simply adores her. I don't see why I couldn't have grown attached to her also, if Mother had only let me alone. But she kept on talking. She told Father she knew for a fact that Latin men were all very immoral, that she was sure Señor Terraza was flagrantly unfaithful to his wife all the time and that he must be a terrible example to his son. She intimated that, of course, Alfredo would be unfaithful to me, too. Señor Terraza seems to be perfectly devoted to his wife, much more than any American husband I've ever seen, but that didn't make any difference to Mother either. She said she was sure the only reason Alfredo wanted to marry me and that his parents were willing was because they thought I had money, that all Latins were fortune-hunters. But that isn't true either. Because Father knew that foreigners do sometimes feel dowries are very important, so he told Señor Terraza frankly to begin with that I wouldn't have any. He thought that might bring matters to a close, so that he wouldn't have to say any more. And Señor Terraza said a dowry was desirable but it wasn't essential, that we could all live together and that we could manage somehow. I do think it is nice for a bride to have a little home of her own. I reckon every girl wants one. But he is right. We could have managed. You and Mrs. Hunter manage all right at Hunter's Green."

Again Veronique was conscious of a choking sensation.

"I still think I could have talked Father around if I could have

spoken to him first. If I could just have gone to him and said, 'Father, Alfredo and I are engaged. We'd like to be married next spring'—I believe if I could have done that everything would have been all right. Bob would have helped, too, if I could have done things that way. He likes Alfredo very much. If everything had been done already, Father wouldn't have tried to undo it. But, you see, Alfredo had never exactly asked me because of this old Spanish custom and so I hadn't said anything to Father. Finally Mother said that all Mexicans were halfbreeds. And that frightened Father. I think he's frightened, anyway, about money and other things. Of course, there's the Klan to think of, too. It might have hurt him to have a son-in-law who is a Catholic. Politically, I mean. He reminded me, too, that just last year four senators were among the prominent Americans who came near being implicated in Mr. Hearst's 'Mexican Documents.' Of course the documents were branded as forgery in the end, and no one's integrity was impugned after all, but it was a close shave. He doesn't want to do anything that would look as if he had any Mexican contacts. He doesn't feel too secure politically and he wants to stay in the Senate. I couldn't bear to make him any more uneasy and unhappy than he is already."

"And now the Terrazas have gone back to Mexico?"

"Yes. Alfredo's gone with his father and mother. Just on leave of absence. But he's asked for a transfer from Washington. He isn't supposed to do that. He's supposed to wait until his Government offers him one. So probably he'll be disciplined by being sent to a very undesirable post in some out-of-the-way place. Anyway, I won't see him any more."

Veronique rose and walked over to Helen. She was essentially a selfish, wilful girl, and her own world had rocked about her that morning. But for the moment she forgot about her grandmother and Welby and the baby and everyone else in the world. Only Helen, who was suffering, and Helen's grief, which was so poignant, were real to her.

"I was so happy. And now I don't see how I can even go on living," she heard Helen saying in a whisper. "When you love a man, that is life, isn't it, Veronique? At least, it's the only part of life that matters——"

It was a long time before Helen could speak connectedly again. Veronique realized that she had valiantly had to keep from crying and that now the moment had come when she could not try any longer. She wept unrestrainedly, sinking down on her knees, hiding her head in Veronique's lap and clinging to her. At last Veronique drew her up on the sofa, so that they could sit side by side, with their arms around each other, and finally Helen's sobs subsided, and she tried to regain her self-control. Eventually she succeeded in doing so. She went out in the kitchen and got a drink of water, and

when she came back she thanked Veronique for being so kind and sympathetic. She said that Isabel Windsor, who also knew what had happened, had been very kind and sympathetic, too. Indeed, Isabel had invited Helen to go abroad with her. Helen had never been abroad, and Isabel thought a trip would do her no end of good. She had all sorts of plans—a season in London, an orgy of shopping in Paris. Isabel had suggested that Helen might find it amusing to be presented at Court. And by spring Captain Arnold would be nicely settled at his new post; he would give them a good time, too——

“I think Isabel has the right idea. But what makes you wait for the spring to go away, if you want to get out of Washington for a little while? Why don’t you come back to Hunter’s Green with me today?”

“Do you mean it, Veronique? Oh, but it’s too soon! I’d be intruding!”

“Nonsense! Welby would love to have you. He thinks you’re a grand girl. And I’d love to have you. I—it would mean a lot to me, Helen, if you’d go home with me.”

“But, Veronique, it couldn’t!”

They were still arguing about it, amicably, when the telephone rang. Helen had outgrown her distaste for the telephone, as she had outgrown her distaste for so many other things. Veronique suspected, with reason, that Alfredo had telephoned fairly often to Helen, that she had learned to listen for his voice and that she still had not given up hope that through some happy miracle she might hear it again. At all events, she rushed to the telephone stand in the hall. There were no longer any lurking suitcases there over which she might stumble. She went as swiftly and as gracefully as a deer, and when she picked up the receiver, her hopefulness rang out in her voice.

“Yes, this is Senator Morton’s apartment. Yes, this is Miss Helen Morton speaking. Long distance? Oh yes, yes! Winchester, Virginia? Did you say *Winchester*? Calling *Mrs. Hunter*? Yes, Mrs. Hunter is here—— Veronique, it’s for you.”

Her voice had gone suddenly flat again. She handed the receiver to Veronique listlessly and went back into the living-room, looking out of one of the big windows in the same forlorn way as she had when she first came to Washington. The trees were all bare now, and the wind was blowing dust and scraps of paper down the street. The statues in the embryonic park stood out starkly in their crude surroundings. They looked hideous to Helen, and still she continued to gaze at them. She did not pay any attention to what Veronique was saying on the telephone. That is, not at first. Then she became aware that a string of important explanations had changed into sharp staccato speech.

“Yes, this is Mrs. Welby Hunter. Oh, hello, Candace! Well, I

did go to my grandmother's first, but I left there about an hour ago. I'm going to have lunch with Helen Morton and after that I'm going to bring her back to Hunter's Green with me. You don't? Well, why not? What *is* it? Right away? Candace, I don't understand. No—— Yes—— Of course——”

Veronique replaced the receiver automatically. But she was still standing by the telephone table when Helen came anxiously up to her. Then she spoke unbelievably, with horror in her voice.

“There's been an accident,” she said. “Welby's been hurt, riding horseback. I don't see how, he's a wonderful rider. But badly hurt, Candace says. She says his back's broken. That couldn't be true, could it, Helen?”

CHAPTER VII

"HE keeps begging to go home. He's been awfully patient about everything, Dr. Foster—all those awful tests to find out whether he could feel or move and the correction frame and the plaster jacket. He's hardly ever complained as it is. I think he deserves to be rewarded. And he says if you'd let him go home he'd never complain about anything again."

"Yes, he says the same thing to me every time I see him. But he can have so much more scientific care at the hospital, Mrs. Hunter, than he could possibly get at home. His condition is critical. Paralysis after a spinal injury is very serious."

"I'd do my best to see that he had good care at home. Really I would. I don't know much about taking care of sick people, but I can learn. And of course we'd keep a nurse—two, if you think we ought to—for the time being anyway. But with Christmas coming on and everything— Don't you really think, Dr. Foster, that if he were only happier he'd get better—as much better as he can, I mean—even if his treatment wasn't quite so scientific?"

Veronique had followed the surgeon when he left Welby's bare, impersonal little room in the Winchester Memorial Hospital and they now stood talking, using the hushed tones automatically indicated by the atmosphere of such institutions, in a corner of the sun parlour, which happened to be deserted, as there was no sunshine that day. Dr. Foster's conviction that he should always speak briefly and brusquely, in order to avoid sentimentality in dealing with his patients, was constantly being undermined by his essential kindheartedness; and as he answered Veronique he betrayed the sympathy which he sincerely felt for both her and her husband.

"I know you'd do your best, Mrs. Hunter. You don't need to tell me that. But a man who's completely helpless from the waist down needs a lot of attention. Some of the service he requires is mighty hard for an amateur to stomach. I don't suppose you're over-squeamish, but you've no idea what this sort of thing is like until you've done it. Besides, he has to be turned and lifted. You haven't consulted me, but, if you don't mind my saying so, you ought not to think of anything of that sort just now."

Veronique nodded. "I know. I won't. Because I realize what it would do to Welby if anything happened to the baby. It's all he's got to live for. So I'd cut off my right hand before I'd risk having anything go wrong with it. I was going to talk to you about that and about my confinement, as soon as we got Welby moved and settled. But I'll talk about it first if you think I ought to. I'd like to have you examine me whenever it's best. And I promise I won't

lift Welby, or do anything like that, until after the baby's born. But I could learn a lot, just watching the nurses. So that later on——"

She stopped, momentarily, as if stumbling over something that was hard for her to say. Then she brought it out.

"There's another reason, besides Welby's longing, that makes me feel I ought to get him out of the hospital as soon as I can. There's the question of expense. We haven't an awful lot to come and go on. And it has cost a good deal here. That neurological surgeon you brought in must be planning to retire on his fee. And besides there have been the other specialists and the X-rays and the good room."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Hunter. I didn't realize that was a consideration, or we might have managed to cut corners a little. But I understood——"

"Yes, I know. Everyone thinks we're very rich. But I won't control my own principal until I'm twenty-one, and I'm only nineteen. I spent every cent. of my income for this year before the accident. Usually I can add to it, a good deal, by bridge. But naturally, since Welby's been in the hospital, I haven't had a chance to play cards. I asked my mother-in-law if we couldn't raise some money by putting a mortgage on Hunter's Green and she laughed at me. Of course, all this has been very upsetting for her, too, or she wouldn't have done that. Usually she's very kind. But she told me that Hunter's Green was mortgaged to the hilt already. It seems that the years from '23 to '26 were very bad for the orchards because of hail and frost. I didn't know anything about those either, but I'm learning. Then there was such a good crop that the markets were flooded, the foreign one especially. The receipts didn't even pay for the freight to England. I may not be getting all of this straight, because I'm not very good at business yet——"

"You're doing remarkably well. I understand the situation pretty thoroughly. You know I have an orchard myself. But I supposed, of course, the Hunters had other sources of income, just as I have one from my practice. They always lived like millionaires."

Veronique nodded. Dr. Foster's apples, like his horses, were famous throughout the Valley and the hunt country. His place, Aurora, was only half a mile down the pike from Hunter's Green. He was a neighbour as well as a medical attendant. This made it easier to talk to him.

"The other sources seem to be pretty well dried up. I was supposed to be a nice fresh one. I don't need to tell you that the banks began to take out mortgages on the orchards after the market was flooded. And the Hunters were counting on me to pay theirs off. Welby never told me, but Candace did, in this moment of excitement I just referred to. I don't know how I can exactly, but I must try. I mustn't let them down, if that was what I was supposed to

do. So if we could take Welby home and cut corners now—without injuring him, of course, or taking any risks with the baby—it would be a welcome saving.”

“But your grandmother!”

“My grandmother hasn’t felt like helping. Perhaps I ought to tell you one thing more, Dr. Foster. I’ve quarrelled with my grandmother. She hasn’t been to see me or even written to me or called me up since Welby was hurt. She thinks I’ve disgraced her. Because of the baby.”

“Because of the baby!”

“Yes. You see, I’m expecting it late in February or early in March. Perhaps you’ll tell me more exactly when you examine me. I suppose we ought to pretend when it’s born that it’s premature. I told my grandmother I would; I told her I’d save her from being faced with a scandal. I’m counting on you to help me do it, and to lie like a trooper when the time comes. But you might as well know the truth right now, Dr. Foster. I don’t mean just about how far along I am, either. Of course, you’d find that out, anyway, as soon as you look me over, if you haven’t guessed already. I mean I’m not sorry the baby started the way it did. Because if it hadn’t it wouldn’t have started at all. Welby wouldn’t have married anyone else because he was chasing after me. I wouldn’t have married Welby. I didn’t love him. I was just helling around. Then I had to marry him. And I can see now it was the best thing that could possibly have happened. Because that way he got his child before it was too late.”

“My dear little lady——”

“I’m thankful I can have it for him, too,” Veronique said fiercely. She had forgotten that she was supposed to speak in a hushed tone, where she was, and her voice rang out freely and clearly.

“I know I’m not saying this the way I ought to. I don’t know how. I don’t mean to sound as if I were bad through and through. But what I’m trying to tell you is that I think it’s a lot better there should be a baby, no matter how it was conceived or when it’s born, than that Welby should feel he wasn’t really a man. He won’t now. I guess if I’m really a woman I can take whatever’s coming to me on the chin.”

Watching her closely during the next weeks, Dr. Foster recognized with amazement that she had told the truth. She unflinchingly met all the requirements of a dreadful situation which, in his opinion, would inevitably become more and more hideous as time went on. Had Welby Hunter’s accident been fatal, as the physician had first feared and then hoped that it would be, the stricken man would have been saved all this helpless suffering which, judging from the symptoms now developing, might be prolonged indefinitely. As for his wife, the doctor thought she might much

better have been his widow. It was inconceivable to him that a girl so beautiful and so vital could endure, without rebellion, the fate of bondage to a hopeless cripple. Her hot young blood had already been her undoing; was it not bound to drive her headlong into further calamity? The first shock of her husband's disaster might well have stirred a sacrificial spirit within her, especially as she felt indirectly to blame for his accident. But would this be proof against time, trouble and deprivation? And how long would such a spirit transcend the normal demands of the flesh, which, once she had recovered from the numbing effects of the travail she herself was facing, would be clamouring again for satisfaction?

He asked himself these questions anxiously, though from the beginning he had admired, with reason, both her sympathetic understanding and her amazing self-control. Welby had still been unconscious when she reached the hospital; but she had insisted on going directly to his room, without waiting to hear a general account of what had happened before doing so. It was possible, the doctor admitted, that Welby might regain at least partial consciousness at any time, and she replied that if that were the case she would not take any chances of being absent when it happened. She seated herself calmly beside her husband's bed, and, without taking her eyes off him except when she faced the doctor to ask a brief question, she listened unflinchingly to the account of the accident.

Welby had gone riding alone, Dr. Foster said, so there were no witnesses; they could only draw their conclusions from the results. He was not found near a hedge or a hurdle of any sort, so it was evident he had not been jumping. Therefore it was hard to explain the fall as one of the "jack-knife" variety, though there were many of the same symptoms. Apparently the horse had shied——

"Which horse was it?"

"Butterfly. She is his favourite, isn't she?"

"Yes, and she's very high-strung. Very sensitive. He's told me dozens of times that she knew everything he was thinking and feeling. If Welby was upset, Butterfly would've reacted to it. Even if he wasn't consciously cruel to her. And he might have been."

"I don't believe Welby was ever consciously cruel to a horse in his life, Mrs. Hunter."

"No, I don't believe he ever was before. But he may have been today. Because he was upset."

"Do you know that?"

"Yes, I know that. And it was my fault, Dr. Foster. I upset him. I'll tell you about it, if it's important you should know."

"No, it isn't important. But I appreciate your sincerity, Mrs. Hunter. If you'll permit me to say so, I admire it very much."

"There's no reason why you should. There's nothing about me to admire. Did you think—— Had Welby been drinking?"

It was the doctor who winced. 'Well, he may have been, Mrs.

Hunter. Mind, I'm not saying that he was drunk. I'm not at all sure that he was. It's a truism that a man can have just as much of a breath after one drink as after a dozen."

"He'd probably had a dozen. I suppose you know that from other symptoms besides his breath. You needn't be afraid to tell me. I may look to you like a sissy, but——"

"You don't look to me like a sissy. Well, I think he may have had—shall we say several drinks, not enough to make him drunk, but enough to affect him adversely? If he were also upset otherwise, as you say he was, he may have taken out his own irritation on Butterfly, either consciously or unconsciously. She may have responded by getting skittish. And Welby may have responded to *that* by giving her really rough treatment, such as she'd never had before—which, of course, would have sent her straight up into the air. She may have thrown him because she bolted out of pure viciousness. Or she may have shied suddenly, as I said in the first place, just because she was frightened at something. It may not have been Welby's fault at all. Don't let yourself dwell on the thought that it was."

"Of course it wasn't Welby's fault. It was my fault. Even if she only shied, it was my fault. She wouldn't have done that if she hadn't been nervous, if Welby hadn't made her nervous—— Did Butterfly gallop back to the stables?"

"Yes. Uncle Ben saw her first. So he went and got Susie. They went out to look for Welby together. They didn't say anything to your mother-in-law until they'd found him. They meant well—they were trying to spare her. But, of course, a lot of time was lost that way. Because she didn't telephone for me until after twelve o'clock. And by the time we could get the ambulance down to the river——"

"You found Welby by *the river*——?"

"Mrs. Hunter, you say you can stand plain talk, so I'm going to talk to you plainly hereafter. But there isn't anything at all to suggest attempted suicide. Welby loved that river road. He often rode there. I've ridden there with him, time and again myself. And I know that at this season of the year, when the ground is covered with dry leaves, rustling and blowing about, and when more leaves are constantly falling from the trees, every which way, in the wind, it's the easiest thing in the world for a horse to get startled——"

The doctor saw that she was not even listening to him any more. Her mind, like her eyes, was fixed on Welby, as if she had knowledge of him transcending any physician's, and as if she were aware of some new need that he had of her. She leaned over him, grasping both his hands. She had hardly taken them in hers when he opened his eyes.

"Ronnie," he muttered. "Ronnie—where am I?"

"You're with me, Welby."

The answer seemed to satisfy him completely. It was nearly an hour before he roused and spoke again. This time he appeared to take her presence for granted.

"Ronnie, I'm cold."

"Yes, it's a very cold night. But you'll be warmer presently. You've been out in the frosty air, but now you're all covered up in bed."

"And—and numb."

"Well, when you're cold you're apt to be numb, too, aren't you? It'll pass off when you're warmer. Let's go to sleep, Welby. Aren't you sleepy? I am."

He drifted off, the discontent and discomfort of the moment forgotten. The doctor looked at Veronique with increased attention.

"How did you know that there was a sensation of cold and numbness after an accident of this sort?"

"Why, I didn't!"

"Then how did you think of the right thing to say so quickly?"

"I said what seemed natural to reassure him, that's all."

"Well, the next time he wakes you may find it harder. He may realize by then that he can't move."

"Won't he ever be able to move again, Dr. Foster?"

The doctor walked over to the window and stood there looking down on the street. He did not see very much of what was passing beneath his eyes. He stood still was a long time. Then he forced himself to turn around.

"No," he said. "I don't suppose he ever will. That is, freely. His head and arms and the upper part of his body, I hope. But nothing below that. At least, I've never seen a case of this kind where there was more of a recovery than that. Someone will have to tell him so in time. Probably it had better be you."

A nurse came down the corridor, her skirts crackling as she approached. Welby Hunter was not the only man in the hospital who was critically injured. She had come to call Dr. Foster for another emergency. He was not gone very long, but when he hurried back he met Welby's own nurse scurrying towards him carrying a basin and crumpled malodorous linen. There was something about her which suggested fright as well as disgust.

"He's been terribly sick to his stomach," she said. "The usual nausea, you know. Now he's crying. His wife says if anyone tries to go into the room until he stops she'll shoot at sight. I'm afraid of that girl, Dr. Foster. There's something uncanny about her."

"You're right, there is," Dr. Foster said dryly. "But you needn't be afraid of her. You might try to copy her instead."

He went on, but he himself stopped at the threshold. The sound of Welby Hunter's sobbing was terrible to hear. But the voice of Welby's wife rose above it, without a break.

"Don't say you tried to turn to me, Welby, and couldn't. What

you mean is you couldn't *move*. But that's nothing. Because it would hurt you if you could. So it's better that you can't. You've been in an accident. There are lots of accidents, you know that. Almost everyone who hunts is in an accident sooner or later. They don't amount to anything, either, unless the men who are hurt *really* haven't anyone to turn to. But you have. You can turn to me because I'm here, because I always will be. You don't need to move to do that. It's my chance now. I've come to you. I've come to you to stay."

All this, and much more, Dr. Foster had heard for himself. In fact, as he told Candace Hunter, he had many moments of feeling he had heard as much as he could stand. But none of it had stilled his anxiety concerning Veronique's ultimate fate. Only the visualization of the pitiful pilgrimage she had made would have done that—the pilgrimage which had begun on the day when she left Hunter's Green in the morning, seething with rage, and returned to it late at night, stunned with shock. Her rebellion against her husband, her defiance of her grandmother, her sympathy with Helen, her horror at Welby's accident—all these had taken heavy toll physically, mentally and spiritually. But out of her wilfulness had come renunciation, out of her understanding loving-kindness, and out of the suffering strength.

The growth, to be sure, had been gradual, the beginnings small and stumbling. In the course of the ride which brought her so irrevocably back to the scene she had sought to desert she could do little more than pray and promise, haltingly, like a child. "Please, God, don't let him die! I'll always feel it was my fault if he does, whether it really was or not. Don't make me a murderess! I promise I'll do better from now on. I don't know how, but I can learn. Truly I can. Truly I will——"

Involuntarily she had remembered a little chapel near Ajaccio, where her father had often taken her when she was a child. She had not been to it or even thought of it for years. But suddenly she wished she could make her petition kneeling before the benign saints and the blinking lights that fronted its altar, instead of straining forward from the leather seat of a speeding roadster. Probably it would mean more if she only could, she thought. There must be a chapel somewhere in the vicinity where she could go in time. She had never troubled to inquire, but now, as soon as possible, she would. Meanwhile, surely what she said would somehow reach the throne of grace and mercy, if it were sincere, if she showed that it was by doing the best she could. "I will do the best I can. I'm a very wicked girl, but I'll try. Honestly, God. Honestly I will."

That had been all at first. But little by little her resurgent faith, like her immature efforts, had taken more definite form. To be sure, she did not go to a chapel for a long time, or even try to do so; but that was because she did not leave Welby to go anywhere; and

as time went on her prayers became more articulate and the sustenance they gave her more secure. She found that they merged, easily and naturally, into periods of contemplation when she thought over the problems that confronted her and considered how best to meet them; and from these periods of contemplation came action, less and less wavering, less and less unreasoning, all the time. That was why she seemed to Dr. Foster so strangely immune to the anxiety which he himself felt. The deeds which were apparently so swift and decisive were actually the result of endless groping towards enlightened service.

First of all, Veronique insisted on discussing Welby's removal from the hospital with him as if he had been a well man, possessed of full powers of reasoning, instead of an invalid whose judgment must necessarily have become unbalanced through anguish. When he said, with pathetic eagerness, that he was willing to endure anything if he could only go home, she assumed the responsibility for his transfer by ambulance and superintended this. Once back at Hunter's Green, she installed him in the room which had always been his and which she had so briefly shared with him, insisting that it did not matter whether or not the nurses disapproved of the tester bed. It was the bed Welby liked, she said, the one he had slept on from childhood; he was ten times as comfortable in it and as happy in it as on one of those horrid, hard hospital cots. And it was much more important, both to her and to him, that Welby should be comfortable and happy than that the nurses should have an easy time of it; if the present ones could not manage, there must be others who could. Confronted with this ultimatum, the nurses decided that they could, after all, manage very well, and regarded young Mrs. Hunter with increased, though reluctant, respect. Having won this point, Veronique took up her own abode in a connecting room. She had no intention of breaking her promise to undertake no physical care of her husband until after her baby was born. But meanwhile she meant to carry out her expressed intention of finding out how it was done, so that later on she could do it herself: and incidentally she also intended to see that no one else neglected it. If Welby's wife were likely to show up at any moment, there was no danger that the day nurse would shirk or that the night nurse would nap. She did not make this point disagreeably, but she made it unmistakably, and again the nurses' estimation of her went up a notch.

She liked her new room very much, she told Welby. It would be ideal, both for her own impending confinement, and later on, when she was back in his, for the baby's nursery. Dr. Foster, happening in when she was talking in this wise, motioned to her to accompany him when he went downstairs and spoke to her rather sternly.

"I'm ready to grant that you've been right about everything you've insisted on doing so far," he said. "But you ought to know

it's folly to talk about sharing your husband's room again, or having your baby in the next one."

"I don't see why. You said yourself a nurse could sleep on the day-bed after we stopped having two, and the same one had to manage day and night duty both. If a nurse could sleep there pretty soon, I could later on. That is, if you think I'd bother Welby in the tester. I don't care which I sleep in myself. But I think Welby would feel a lot more like we were still married to each other if I slept somewhere in his room. In fact, he's told me that he would. We can settle the exact spot later on."

"I didn't realize you'd talked all this over with my patient already, without consulting me."

"He's your patient, but he's my husband. I talk everything over with him. I thought you found that out at the hospital. Naturally I don't do it when I see he's awfully tired, or in unusually great pain. But he likes to have me talk to him, especially at twilight. He says it keeps him from lying there dreading the night that's ahead of him."

Dr. Foster tried to make another severe remark, but it ended in a brief sympathetic bark.

"It's a lot harder for a man to be laid up than a girl," Veronique went on, encouraged by this sound. "You must know that. He can't do anything with his hands, like knitting or fancy work, and the way he looks doesn't mean a thing to him either. My grandmother makes one useless afghan after another when she's under the weather, and I knew a girl once who broke her leg, and who managed to spend hours and hours over her nighties and her hair and her fingernails. Especially her fingernails. She had lacquer all over everything, making colour combinations. Her nurses almost went crazy, but she had such a grand time that she nearly lost interest in getting up again—not quite, but nearly. Of course, she wasn't as badly off as Welby is, but you get the idea. Then if Welby cared anything about books, that would help. I could read aloud to him, until he was well enough to read himself. He never has though. But he does like to have me rattle on about anything that comes into my head during his better moments. And he likes to feel I'm in the room during the worst ones."

"Well—I'll concede the possibility that you might sleep on the day-bed, a long time hence. But I shan't lend myself to any crazy scheme of staging an accouchement in the next room to a very sick man. He'd be wrung past all endurance by the consciousness of your suffering. I suppose it has occurred to you that you are going to suffer!"

"Oh yes! It's occurred to Welby, too. But if he's close to me, while it's going on, the way he would have been if he'd been well, it won't be half so hard for him as it would be if he kept wondering what was happening."

"My dear child, I'm amazed that such a modern young woman as you are doesn't realize that husbands were long ago eliminated from confinement scenes. That sort of thing belonged to the dark ages of midwifery."

"Maybe. But Welby's awfully old-fashioned in lots of ways, Dr. Foster. He's heard about other babies that were born at Hunter's Green, what happened when he was, and his father and his grandfather and so on. He's always wanted to know what happened when his son was born. So he's going to. I'm not going to the hospital, where he couldn't even see the baby for two or three weeks after it was born. And you needn't suggest that I'd get more scientific care at the hospital either. I know I would—the way Welby did. And just look how he's improved since I got him home!"

Since this was undeniably true, Dr. Foster gave no answer beyond another short bark.

"And you needn't suggest that I should move into some room down at the other end of the hall, so that Welby won't hear me scream. I'm not going to scream. You wait and see."

As if dismissing a closed subject, Veronique began to talk about Christmas plans. She said she meant to hang up the family stockings around the fireplace in Welby's room, and to set the tree in the corner where his tallboy usually stood. It would be easy enough to move the tallboy out into the hall for a few days. Mrs. Hunter, who had naturally postponed her round of visits as a result of the accident, was now considering the feasibility of making them after all. She would stay at Hunter's Green for Christmas, and she entered good-naturedly into Veronique's plans for celebrating it, but after the New Year she thought she would be on her way.

"It isn't as if this weren't going on and on forever," she said to Veronique one evening, when a hypodermic had assured Welby's rest for the next few hours, and the other two sat talking in the gun-room. "I can't very well spend the rest of my life here just because Welby has got to. I don't think he expects me to. Do you, Ronnie?"

"I'm sure he doesn't. He asked me just yesterday when you were going. He didn't say 'if.'"

"Well—I never was any good in a sick-room," Mrs. Hunter went on, slightly discomfited by something in Veronique's voice. "And with two nurses and you—— By the way, has Dr. Foster told you when he thinks you can get along with one nurse?"

"Yes. When I'm on my feet again, after the baby's born."

"That's a long time yet to go on paying those fantastic salaries. I don't see where the money's coming from."

"I don't either. But I'll scare it up somehow."

"Well, you've been resourceful so far, I'll say that for you. I never would have believed you could get so much for that fancy roadster of yours. And you've been a darn good sport about every-

thing. I didn't think you had it in you. But it'll be mighty lonely for you here after I'm gone, I'm afraid. I liven up the scene a little, if I do say so."

"I can have company, if I want to," Veronique said, disregarding both compliments. "Helen Morton would be glad to come down any time. And Isabel Windsor, too."

"Helen Morton is a nice little thing," Candace conceded generously. "But I fail to understand why everyone is so crazy about Isabel. She never had the courage of her convictions about anything. By anything, of course, I mean Giles Arnold especially. First she was afraid to marry him. And then after she was married to someone else she was afraid to be his mistress. I think women like that deserve all they get."

"What do they get?" inquired Veronique, with genuine interest.

"Why, nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"But why was she afraid to marry him?"

"She was afraid of being poor," Candace said contemptuously.

"You can always charge things and put bills under your mattress afterwards. At least you can do it for a long time, and then you can usually manage to pay something on account, or you can go into bankruptcy in an unobtrusive way. But Isabel didn't seem to think of that. Her people were the very most primitive 'cave dwellers' in Washington, but none of them had a red cent. She'd scrimped and saved, and seen scrimping and saving going on all around her until she was sixteen or seventeen, and the loveliest-looking girl you can imagine. Then she went over to Annapolis for her first June Week and met Giles, who was a lieutenant, and everything else that is the answer to love's young dream. Except rich. She kept making late dates with him after the poor midshipman who had invited her over there had been sent off to bed, and things got very intense. But her family put the screws on, and after a great many fireworks and endless delays and rivers of tears, she gave him up, and married Stephen Windsor, who had millions and delirium tremens. If you think Welby didn't know how to hold his liquor, you ought to have seen Stephen Windsor just once. Not that you're ever likely to now."

"I never said Welby didn't know how to hold his liquor. What are you talking about?"

"My mistake. Well, just then I was talking about Isabel and Stephen and Giles. The year after Stephen and Isabel were married, Giles inherited a million himself from an uncle who had gone to the Klondike in the first gold rush and that no one had ever heard of since."

"But why didn't Isabel divorce Stephen, if he was such a bum, and marry Giles after all?"

"Well, in those days a divorcee was still supposed to be very detrimental to a young officer's career. I don't know that Giles asked her to do that. He was crazy about her but he was crazy

about his career, too. Besides, all her family were very High Church. They put the screws on again. And eventually I suppose Isabel and Giles took it for granted that their relationship wasn't to be marriage. They were agreed as to what it shouldn't be, but not as to what it should be. Giles wanted what any man would want, under the circumstances, and Isabel wanted to stop just short of that with an *amitié amoureuse*. I've got to admit that I think Isabel won out. How she's held on to him so long, on that basis, I can't imagine. A lot of the most attractive Naval officers I've known have been roped in by the worst nitwits and the biggest pills you could ever hope to find, even if you looked for them. There seems to be something about the wearers of brass buttons that makes them easy prey as a rule, whereas an iceman with nothing but hair on his chest can defend himself. But any number of knock-outs have pined after Giles in vain. He's always been faithful to his Cythera, after his fashion."

"Is he still?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. What makes you ask?"

"Nothing. Except that Helen gets letters every now and then from Zoe Wing——"

"You mean that red-headed girl that made a by-line with her Zephyr?"

"Yes. She's abroad now, you know, writing more of those Zephyr articles. She crossed on the same boat with Giles, and I gather that he took quite a tumble for her. Not that I know anything about it. But most men do. Bob Morton did. And Zoe writes as if Giles took her out on the town every now and then."

"Well, if there's anything in it, that would be a body blow for Isabel, after all these years. Don't forget to tell me, Ronnie, if you hear anything else. You'll write to *me* regularly, won't you, while I'm gone?"

"Oh yes. I'll write to you regularly."

Candace glanced at her, half curiously and half sympathetically. "It's too bad you can't get away yourself for a while," she said casually. "I suppose you'd like to. It would be only natural that you should."

"I haven't thought about such a thing. I'm getting to like it here a lot."

"Well, as I said before, you've certainly been a good sport about everything. I hand it to you, Ronnie."

Ronnie had told one of her few "lavender lies" when she said she never even thought about getting away. Inevitably she had her moments of inner revolt and deep desperation. But no one, except Father Flynn, the wiry little priest from Winchester, ever knew this, and no one except Dabney Turberville, the local Master of Fox Hounds, ever guessed it. And both the priest's knowledge and

the sportsman's intuition helped her over the hard places which Candace instinctively skirted. And meanwhile Veronique kept her word about writing, doing this, as she did everything else, with the dogged determination which mysteriously paved the way to pleasant ease.

It was amazing, too, to find how much there was to write about. Candace had charged her to keep an alert eye on the servants, which was more than she did herself. But Veronique made a conscientious effort to supervise them, and to let her mother-in-law know the results. "They all drink too much, except good old Susie," Candace had told her. "I mean, they drink more than we do, if they can get it. Cleo and Florine are both flighty, and Uncle Tam is a regular old toper. You'll have to lock up the liquor, every night, after you've finished with it yourself." Veronique had decided that it would perhaps be tactful not to tell Candace that she did not intend to get it out at all, but this was the plan she adopted, with surprisingly good results. She made a substantial saving, and with a sober mistress in charge of supplies the negroes began to behave themselves. Veronique reported financial curtailment and domestic order, without going into details about the methods, and Candace read her reports with approval combined with astonishment.

Besides writing about the conduct of the servants, Veronique wrote about the condition of the estate. On days when the weather was good she walked in the gardens and the orchards, for Dr. Foster was most insistent that she must have air and exercise. It was lovely outdoors. The box and the magnolias never lost their glossy green. Even when snow fell their verdure glistened through it, and the tiny fallen box leaves made a tawny carpet which no white blanket ever wholly concealed. The ivy which mantled the stone house and wreathed the sycomore trees was green, too. Veronique broke off branches of it and took it into Welby's room, where she put it into clear glass jars. She could see the beauty in the box and the magnolias and the ivy from the beginning and soon she began to see it even in bare branches and wind-swept terraces. She tried to express her joy in this discovery, first in talking to Welby, and then in writing to Candace. She asked eager questions, too, on subjects which had never interested her before. Why had the key to the garden tomb been thrown away? What was the meaning of the "secret statue," placed where boughs hung over it and hedges hemmed it in? In answering, Candace gave her one version of these stories through her letters and Welby another, as Veronique sat with him in the twilight. Finally she said, laughingly, that when Zoe Wing came back from Europe they must have her dash down in her Zephyr so that she could write about these romantic features of Hunter's Green. But at the moment Veronique did not invite anyone after all. She was content without company.

As a matter of fact, however, she had a good deal of it. Her neighbours dropped in on her more and more frequently, and though they never stayed long, because they sensed her reluctance to sit apart from Welby, she felt their friendliness. This was especially true in the case of Dabney Turberville, who was one of her most faithful visitors. His father had been American Ambassador to Great Britain, and his early life had been spent almost entirely in England, where he had hunted from youth up. Now that he had returned to his native heath, he spent most of his time in the same way. As Candace expressed it, he was "pictorially perfect" when he drifted in, his pink coat unbuttoned over his leather waistcoat, his crop and gloves held lightly in a long lean hand. His picturesque aspect and the frequency of his visits gave Veronique the excuse that she needed for putting on a pretty dress and fluffing up her hair and giving extra touches to her make-up and hands. It did something to her morale to get ready, with normal youthful vanity, for male company. Welby thought she looked beautiful no matter what she had on, or how little attention she paid to the details of meticulous grooming; in time this very fact might have made her careless about them or caused her to feel that they were futile and silly. However, she knew that Dabney Turberville's standards about such things were not only high but exacting, and his unconcealed, though restrained, appreciation of her appearance kept her wholesomely buoyed up. He drank very little. But he loved to sit in front of a fire, nursing a glass from which he barely sipped, and toasting his polished boots on the fender. He was not a talkative man, and when he did speak his conversation centred almost entirely on hunting topics. But his silences were warm and unstrained, and he brought the atmosphere of fresh fields and frosty air into the house with him. He gave Veronique a sense of permanence and invigoration. And he declined to countenance her aversion to his own avocation.

"We've missed having you with us this year. But by autumn you ought to be in fine form."

"Mr. Turberville, I've never hunted and I'm never going to. I've always hated horses. And now, after what's happened to Welby——"

Dabney Turberville put down his already neglected glass, and clasped his fine hands loosely together in front of him, as he leaned forward towards the fire. "I was afraid you'd feel that way," he said. "That's why I brought up the subject. Because you mustn't. You must manage to give Welby vicariously the joy he'd have normally had out of life by learning to love this country and all that it stands for yourself. By riding regularly to hounds. By bringing home the brush. By gathering your neighbours in for hunt breakfasts, and speeding them on their way with stirrups."

Veronique stirred, rebelliously, in her seat, but she did not answer.

"And by going further than that. By teaching your child to do it, too. You don't mind having me speak about the baby, do you? We're all so tremendously pleased."

"I don't mind having you speak about it and I'm glad you're pleased. But I'll never let my child ride."

"Won't you? Not even to give Welby his own youth back again? Not even to let him see the future of Hunter's Green as a strong symbol?"

Again she made no direct answer and, after a moment's silence, the talk drifted into other channels. But the next time that Father Flynn, her other most frequent visitor, came in to see her, she asked him a direct question.

"Do you think I'm a coward, Father?"

"A coward, my daughter? No. I should have called you singularly brave."

"I'm afraid that Dabney Turberville thinks I'm a coward. Because I've said I'd never let my child ride."

"Ah—— Well, I believe the time will come when you will lose your hatred for horses, as you've lost your hatred for so many other things. And never is a very long time. You told me when I first went to see you at the hospital that you never went to church any more. But you were there last Sunday."

"I didn't suppose you saw me."

"The church was not so overcrowded that it was hard," the priest said a little ruefully. "And I was glad to see you there. So glad that I cannot help telling you so."

"I shouldn't suppose you'd want a black sheep like me in your flock."

"Black? Are you black? I can see nothing black about you except your hair, which is your crowning glory, and your eyes, which have a tender light in them when you speak of your husband. Have you perhaps merely strayed a little? There is a very beautiful story in the Bible about a sheep that strayed. The shepherd wanted it very much. So much that he left all the others to go in search of it."

"Yes, I remember. But, Father, I've been a very bad girl. And a very bad Catholic, too. I haven't been to Confession or to Communion since I can remember."

"It would be a simple matter for you to go first to one and then to the other at any time."

"It sounds simple. I did confess—in a different way—to Dr. Foster. But it would be harder to do it to you."

"I would try to see that it was not too hard. And I think that the hard things may be like the things you have hated. I think that little by little they will disappear."

It was because she found that Father Flynn was right about the things she had hated that she was able, in time, to take his word about the things that were hard. She went to the stables and the kennels every day, so that she could tell Welby what was happening there and so that she could write intelligent reports to her mother-in-law, and presently she found that this was not an ordeal but a pleasure. She learned the names of the horses and dogs very quickly; more slowly she learned the animals' general characteristics and their surprisingly individualistic traits. She was touched and astonished when she found that they recognized her, that they revealed gladness at her approach, that they were actually growing attached to her. She mentioned this rather shyly to Welby, and then found herself stricken by the wistful, patient look that had come into his eyes.

"Listen," she said hurriedly. "When you're better we'll go *together* to see the horses and the dogs."

He turned his head away from her, and she knew he did it because he did not want her to see that his eyes were wet. She went stubbornly on.

"Yes, we will," she insisted. "I've been thinking, Welby, about a special sort of wheel-chair that I believe could be built for you. I've drawn a sketch of one. I've shown it to Dr. Foster and he thinks it has possibilities. He's going to talk to another doctor about it, to a specialist. If they agree that it might work he's going to have it made. You couldn't use it right away, of course, but by and by—— I can put the baby into it, too, beside you, and wheel you both."

There was no movement at all on the pillow now. Welby could not bear to look at her or to have her look at him.

"Besides," she went on, "I've been wondering—— Of course, it would be awfully hard to part with any of them, when you're so fond of them. But thoroughbreds have *value*, haven't they? You don't *have* to keep them just for pleasure, do you, and depend entirely on the orchards for income? I mean, I don't know anything at all about breeding, but couldn't you teach me? So that I could sell some of the puppies, that is if I were sure they would have good homes—— Or develop a stud farm—— Or something—— And then when I could wheel you out to see what I was doing, you could advise me. We would be partners. We could share our profits and our losses."

This time Welby did turn his head. And somehow he managed, for the first time, to reach for her hand.

"Our profits and our losses," he said under his breath. "*Partners*—— Oh, Ronnie!"

He did not seem to mind any more having her see that his eyes were wet.

On the very bad days, when she could not walk in the orchards

and gardens, and when even her visits to the cold kennels and stables were curtailed, she wandered about the house. Hitherto she had spent most of her spare time in the gun-room, leaving it only rarely for the fine library which opened out of it or the great double drawing-rooms on the further side of the spacious entrance hall, embellished with landscape paper, which ran straight through the house. The family portraits, the period furniture, the damask draperies and Aubusson rugs, the great globes and ancient musty volumes—these had never “said” anything to her before. Now she began to inspect them, first to make sure that Uncle Ben and Cleo were caring for them properly and then to regard them in another practical light which merged into her tardy appreciation.

“Welby,” she said one evening, when she was sitting beside him in the twilight as he loved to have her, “I don’t see why we shouldn’t open this house to tourists. No—wait a minute. I don’t mean to have them stay here. At least, not now, though that might come later on. I mean just to have them drop in to see the ground floor. We could put up a sign at the outer gate and stick a notice in the papers. We’d have to think up something short and snappy for the sign, but the notice could read something like this: ‘The Countess Veronica will be pleased to receive visitors at Hunter’s Green from four to six every afternoon. A nominal charge of two dollars will be made for a personally conducted tour through the historic rooms and beautiful gardens. Tea on the terrace, a dollar extra.’”

“Ronnie, I can’t have you capitalizing your name and commercializing my home like that!”

“Wouldn’t it be better than losing our home, Welby? We’ve got to think now of saving it for our son, not only of enjoying it ourselves. And the interest on those mortgages is pretty steep. I want to get rid of it, or at least reduce it, as soon as I can. Of course, we don’t need to decide right away. I can’t very well act the elegant hostess with my present figure! But I think I’ve got a good idea there, Welby, really I do. I can just see bloated bondholders goggling at Great-Aunt Penelope’s portrait and Grandpa Courtney’s toddy warmer.”

She gave him further food for thought, even though she got no definite answer out of him. And as she continued her explorations she found more and more material on which to work. There was a cabinet in the disused front drawing-room which was full of little ornaments and trinkets—an “apostle’s spoon” which, allegedly, had once belonged to Henry VIII, two scent bottles in the shape of snails, a snuff-box made of “cameo glass” and an inkstand made of “vaseline glass,” an end of the day bowl. She brought them up to Welby’s bedside one by one and asked him to tell her about them; and as she did so, with pride and pleasure, she repeated her suggestion that in the spring they must ask Zoe Wing to come down.

"People like to read about antiques that have stories to them," she said practically. "Editors pay money for such stories, too. If Zoe found things to write about in our house, she might give us a commission when she sold the stories. Is there a story about this, too?"

"This" was a bracelet, her latest find. It was not with the scent bottles and the snuff-box and the other objects which were in plain view in the cabinet. It was in a little drawer at the back, which Veronique did not discover for some time. It was made in a wide band, worn very thin, but studded with precious stones on the outside and engraved on the inside with initials, a date and a motto.

"'R. H.—A. B.—1677'," she read aloud. "'Memory more true than mine.' Do you know what that means, Welby?"

"Yes. R. H. was Ronald Hunter—the first Hunter to come to this country. He lived in Tidewater, Virginia, and went from there to Charlottesville and then on to Staunton and up the Valley. It was his great-grandson who built this house. A. B. was Althea Bainbridge, an ancestress of Stewart's. He and I are more or less related, like most Virginians. Ronald and Althea were lovers."

"Yes, so I supposed. But which one was it that had the truer memory?"

"She did. They were promised to each other when they were both very young, just kids really. Then she stayed behind in Tidewater when he first struck out for the Valley, because her family thought she wasn't old enough to face the 'perils of the wilderness and the pangs of childbirth.' She begged him to take her, anyway; she said she wasn't afraid of either one. In fact, she ran off and joined him. But he took her back to her own people. I reckon they had him scared about her, even if she wasn't scared about herself. Or maybe he really didn't want to be bothered with her. She wasn't as pretty then as she was later on—there's a picture of her, taken when she was a child, rather prim-looking, wearing a muslin cap that covered her curls. And it was mighty rough going in those days. Anyhow, he struck out secretly with some other men after he'd got her back home, and didn't give her a chance to make a fuss about it. There wasn't a woman among the lot of them."

"I think the men were old meanies not to take them."

"That's one way of looking at it. But there were a good many Indians around in those days, adding to the above-mentioned perils. Of course, some of them were warriors, and, on the other hand, a good many of them were girls. Ronald and his companions did what you might expect under the circumstances: they killed off as many of the men as they could and kept as many of the women as they could get. He didn't go back to Tidewater for twelve years. Naturally, there wasn't much communication in those days, so he'd hardly heard from Althea in the meantime. But he found she was still waiting for him."

"Did he really want her after all that time? Or did he marry her just because he felt he had to?"

"Oh, he wanted her! He wanted her a good deal more than he had in the first place. She'd grown very beautiful and had staved off any number of suitors during his absence. But he was in a very hot spot. Because, you see, he'd acquired an Indian family and he didn't quite know what to do about that."

"Well, what did he do?"

"Finally, he told Althea. And she decided to marry him just the same. Not to prove that she could. She wanted him, too. He gave her that bracelet for a wedding present."

"So they were married and lived happily ever afterwards?"

"They lived happily for about a year. Then she was attacked by the Indians when Ronald was away from home. Out of revenge. Somehow she shielded her baby until help came. But she was so badly wounded that she died soon afterwards."

"So it was a sad story after all?"

"I reckon most love-stories are sad, if you know all the facts and follow them through to the end."

"Ours isn't. It's a grand story."

On the tenth of March, when the lawn was already studded with crocuses and jonquils were shooting up in the bare beds bordering the grass, there was a sudden unseasonable snowstorm. Veronique, caught in it during the course of her walk, stopped long enough to pick a few of the brave little blossoms, and brought them to Welby with the snow still on their petals and great flakes of it on her dark hair. He looked at her with admiration mingled with fond concern as she arranged them around the room, where long sprays of forsythia and fuzzy pussy-willows were already rising from the clear glass jars which earlier in the winter had been filled with ivy and with holly.

"You're not wet, are you, Ronnie? Or cold?"

"Not a bit cold and only the least bit wet. I'll change, though, if it'll make you feel any easier."

"Well, you know, just now——"

"Yes. I'll go. It's funny, isn't it, that the baby should be late? Dr. Foster says first babies often are. But it's such luck, in this case. If he's three weeks late, and Dr. Foster says he's three weeks early—why, there won't be anything to talk about. We'll have made an honest infant out of him after all. Just think of the disappointment for Grandma and her cronies!"

She went out of the room laughing. When she came back she had taken off her tweeds and had on a loose robe made of crimson silk. Her cheeks were nearly as red as its rich folds, and she was still laughing, as if something had amused her very much.

"We may not have quite that much margin. But we have enough. I'm going to telephone Dr. Foster, Welby."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. But I'll be back. Don't worry."

It was not until after midnight that she finally left his room for good. In the intervening hours she had been back and forth, putting things to rights, giving final orders, making final arrangements. Welby had grown comfortably drowsy in the meanwhile. Sometimes as she came and went he was hardly conscious of it. When she leaned over him for the last time to kiss him good-night as usual, there was still some colour in her face, and though she was not laughing any more, she was smiling.

"The door may be closed for just a little while, Welby, because I'll probably have a few whiffs of ether, and I don't want the smell to bother you. But it won't be for long. I'll call to you myself when it's over."

"Yes, Ronnie."

"And Dr. Foster will bring the baby in and put it right down beside you where you can touch it."

"Yes, Rommie."

"But now you must get some sleep because it's very late, and you haven't slept soundly so far tonight. You've just dozed. Dr. Foster is going to give you something. We both need our own private brand of dope to help us through, don't we?"

"Yes, Ronnie."

"Is there anything special you want to say to me before I go?"

"Yes, Ronnie. Something very special. I want to say I love you dearly."

"And there's something very special I want to say to you. I love you, Welby. I love you dearly, too."

It was not a good-night kiss that they gave each other. It was a kiss that meant they were pledged for all eternity.

Welby must have slept more deeply than at any time since the accident. When he began to wake at last he drifted back into semi-slumber and then into semi-wakefulness easily several times. It was very still. Somewhere in the room, he knew, his nurse must be sitting watching over him. But he could not see her, and he kept forgetting about her almost as soon as he remembered her.

At last he became aware that daylight had come, and he realized, with a pang, what had happened. He had slumbered through Veronique's hours of anguish; he had not shared her suffering, even vicariously. Then suddenly he knew that she had meant, all along, to spare him in this way, by giving him the illusion of communion with her, while actually she fought her fight alone. But when he turned his head he saw that the door leading into her room was open. It had still been open when he went to sleep, so he had never seen it shut. The closeness was not all illusion after all.

Beyond the door he could see Veronique's bed and Veronique lying on it. Her colour was gone now, and her smile. She was as white as the sheets against which she lay, and her lips were only a line in her face. The silence deepened, and a great fear clutched at his heart. Then, as if he had called her, Veronique opened her eyes and spoke to him.

"We've got a beautiful boy, Welby. He's having his first bath now, and then he'll be in to see you. He's big and strong; you'll be delighted with him. And my, but you'll be proud the first time you see him on a horse!"

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE they left for Europe in the spring, Isabel and Helen motored over to Hunter's Green to see Veronique and the baby.

Veronique had not asked them to do so; it was Isabel who suggested it, and when her note arrived Veronique answered it cordially and promptly. But she had still not reached the point where she felt impelled to take the initiative in seeking companionship. Her days were so crowded, her hours of repose so brief and broken, that she lived through them as she could and as they came, without cluttering them any further.

She had made a quick recovery after her baby's birth, and she was amply able to nurse him. Her milk was abundant, and the supply showed no signs of abating after she was up and about. She had insisted, from the beginning, that Welby's nurses would have to do double duty during the confinement period; and when the little boy was a few weeks old she dismissed the one whom she had found the less capable and obliging of the two, reminding Dr. Foster that she had intended, all along, to help take care of Welby herself as soon as she could. In fact, by fall, when the baby was weaned and the weather temperate, she meant to assume the entire responsibility for the care of both her husband and her child.

"You'll never be able to do it, never in the world," Dr. Foster told her emphatically. "You might manage one or the other, if you put your back to it. As I see you mean to. But a helpless infant and a helpless man at the same time—— It can't be done. You'll neglect one or the other or else kill yourself."

"I shan't do anything of the sort," Veronique retorted. "I'm teaching Susie as fast as I learn myself. I think she'll make a very good practical nurse. Coloured women have a natural gift for nursing; they're kind and patient and devoted. Why, you know yourself that Southern mammies were famous all over the world! Susie was Welby's mammy when he was a little boy, and she's been simply aching to be allowed to 'do' for him. Besides, she worships Ben."

Ben was a new name in Hunter history. Veronique had again shown her disinclination towards conforming with tradition when it came to christening her son. If there had been any good nickname for Welby, she said, she would have wished to name the baby after his father; since there was not, and two Welbys would cause confusion, she wanted to name him Benedetto for her own father. There was a delightful way of shortening that, and it meant a great

deal more to her than Courtney or Hugh or Godfrey, or any of the other names she could find in the family genealogy, which she actually consulted with some care. Moreover, she thought a Corsican touch would liven up the annals of all those stuffy old Virginian squires. She made the comment laughingly, without malice, and Welby laughed too and upheld her in her wish, which, he said, was a reasonable one. He did not raise any objection, either, when she told him she wanted the baby baptized almost immediately by Father Flynn, and Father Flynn in turn said that under all the circumstances—the distance from a church and the inclement weather and so on—there was no reason why the ceremony should not take place at Welby's bedside, which it did, with Veronique propped up in a wing chair by the hearthstone, and no witnesses except the sponsors and the servants.

The French Ambassador and his wife motored over from Washington to act as godparents, and so did Victorio Fopiano, the Italian attaché, whose attentions to Candace Hunter were still unabated. But, in spite of the handsome presents they brought and the impressive showing they made, Candace was greatly displeased. A christening to her meant a large hilarious party, with quantities of the best champagne flowing freely and the most secluded seats in the garden all occupied. In fact, Veronique had never seen her mother-in-law's good nature crack as badly as it did over the arrangements for the simple baptism. But, as she pointed out, there were enough bills hidden under the mattresses already without trying to stuff in any more, and Candace had not even been down to see the baby before everything was all settled, and, after all, Welby was satisfied and he was the person to decide. He was the master of Hunter's Green.

Candace raised her eyebrows when this conversation took place, and she referred to it, rather resentfully, when she next met Isabel Windsor. The two saw each other fairly often, for Isabel was still regularly engaged in pouring "enough tea to swim to China in" at the most distinctive gatherings, and Candace was still sojourning in Washington, having succeeded in making her round of visits "last" even longer than she had dared to hope at first. She had seen no reason for abbreviating these, until the spring weather was settled, or—as she did not hesitate to add—all the confusion caused by a confinement in the house was over. She accepted Isabel's congratulations with a wry smile and an evasive manner, and it did not take Isabel long to guess that she was not enthusiastic about being publicly labelled as a grandmother. Isabel was indignant with Candace, but when she arrived at Hunter's Green and spoke to Veronique about the episode, Veronique only laughed.

"Well, after all, it's natural, isn't it, Isabel? You see, Candace has always told everybody that she was married when she was 'a mere child' and she does look awfully young, considering. Then

she and Welby were never seen much together in Washington. I used to think it was accidental; now I suppose it wasn't. Most of her cronies and admirers got the idea that he was just a little boy, sent away to school at a ridiculously early age, because she felt that 'without a man in the house' she couldn't cope with him. Heaven knows there were always plenty of men in the house, in one capacity or another. But I suppose that's beyond the point. Anyway, Welby slid through college and began to play around himself before her friends noticed it. Then suddenly he was a father, when they'd still been picturing him in knickerbockers, or even rompers for all I know. Of course, there are some strange cases of precocity, but still——"

"Veronique, you're incorrigible."

"Maybe so. Do you know, Isabel; I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Candace got married again? I think she's felt sort of restless and dissatisfied this winter. You know she and my grandmother and Mrs. Rutherford and Mrs. Burgess have always spent a lot of time together, lunching and playing bridge and gossiping at each other's houses once a week. They've done it for years, and by the time they'd parted at the end of the afternoon they'd torn everything and everybody in Washington to pieces; then they went home licking their chops over the mutilated remains. I spoiled all that for Candace, because, of course, neither she nor Grandma could very well talk about me and the other two were dying to. I understand dear Grandma got around the situation by saying she understood Candace wasn't going up to town this winter. Anyway, before Candace got there she invited Mrs. Minnie Stack, that flat-faced widow from Iowa, to make up the foursome. It's wonderful how the supply of widows from the Middle West holds out, isn't it? I understand this one raised hogs."

"No, Veronique. Her husband raised corn."

"Well, she fed the corn to the hogs, didn't she? Something like that? Not that it matters. I hear she goes to luncheons wearing sweeping velvet dresses, plumed hats and crown jewels. Not that this matters either. But she was all installed in the sacred circle by the time Candace arrived to make her first visit at Mrs. Burgess', and the old vulture coughed and choked while she was trying to tell Candace that she would have to find a new way to amuse herself on Wednesdays while the foursome was going on."

"Ronnie, you're getting your metaphors mixed. Vultures don't cough and choke."

"I bet they do. Anyway, Candace found herself a new beau to spend her Wednesdays with. I think myself she's beaten the vultures at their own game. I bet she gets him for good before summer and goes off on a honeymoon, while they're still cackling and clawing at the cards. More power to her. I like Candace, Isabel, I really do. She's got lots of good points. Let's go upstairs, shall we? I can

hear the kid yelling his head off. It's time I fed him. And I know Welby's had a grand gossip with Helen, but I mustn't let him get too tired. He'll take a little nap while we're at luncheon, and then afterwards he can talk to you."

Veronique took the stairs in a series of bounds, and Isabel, mounting them more slowly and rather thoughtfully, found her already lifting the baby from his old-fashioned cradle when she herself entered the nursery. The howls had ceased; the baby was crowing now, and gurgling, as his mother tossed him in the air. Veronique changed him capably and deposited him in Isabel's lap while she went to wash her hands. He stared up at Isabel with large trustful eyes, grasping at a gold chain she was wearing, and kicking vigorously under the knitted blanket that covered him; finally, sensing her friendliness, he smiled and began to thrash around as if everything in life were a great joke. By the time his mother returned he was chuckling audibly. Veronique was obliged to pry him loose from the chain, which was tightly clutched in his fists and fast approaching his mouth, before she could draw him away from Isabel. Then taking him in her arms she sat down in a low rocker and unfastened her dress.

Isabel watched her with increasing astonishment and perplexity. She had been immediately struck, upon her arrival at Hunter's Green, with the change in Veronique's bearing and manner. Despite the swiftness with which she moved, and the ease of her attitude, the girl had gained immeasurably in dignity. Her assurance now seemed to spring less from boldness than from poise which was partly natural and partly cultivated; Isabel had the feeling that it would be immune to almost any form of attack. Veronique spoke less slangily than had formerly been her habit, and her speech revealed keen perception; her occasional lapses into the vernacular of brazen or gilded youth seemed more or less intentional, as if they were surrounded by quotation marks; actually she spoke fluently and well. All this had not failed to make a favourable impression; but it was not nearly as poignant as the impression she made with her baby. She had let her hair grow during the winter because she had not been able to get out sufficiently often to keep it properly trained; it was long enough now to knot in the back, above the nape of her neck, and it swept away from a central part in thick, crisp waves which framed her face. The glowing colour in her cheeks merged gradually into a softer tint; her throat was tinged with rose in a way that made it look warm, but below that her skin was increasingly snowy. She was deep-bosomed, as became a new-made mother; but she had not taken on weight or grown clumsy. The fullness of her breasts only accentuated the slimness of her waist and the grace of her posture. The baby fed lustily, kneading with his hands as he did so. He was heavy, but Veronique held him without effort. She sat watching him raptly, her head

bent and her limbs relaxed, all the separate parts of her being in complete harmony with each other. She seemed utterly unconscious of the bared beauty of both body and spirit which she revealed until she glanced up and saw Isabel looking at her. Then she flushed. But she did not cover her breast or avert her gaze.

"Aren't you sorry you haven't a child?" she inquired suddenly.

"I've never thought much about it. Until just now, as I've sat here watching you."

"Well, aren't you sorry now?"

"A little, for the moment. But I'll get over it when I begin to think about other things. You're rather breath-taking to look at, though, Veronique."

"Is it too late?"

"Too late? Oh—you mean for me to have a baby? Yes, I'm afraid it is."

"Why, you can't be more than thirty-five."

"I'm only thirty-two. I didn't mean it that way. I meant—my husband is an invalid, you know that. Ours isn't quite the usual marriage."

"What happens to Stephen when you go abroad?" asked Veronique, speaking abruptly again.

"There's a sanitarium in New Jersey where he's spent all his summers for a long time. He likes to go there."

"Doesn't he get lonely without you? Couldn't you help him if you stayed with him?"

"No, I'm sure he doesn't get lonely without me. He looks forward to going. And I can't do anything to help him, Ronnie. It's—it's too late."

"Was it always?"

"My dear, what makes you ask me so many questions all of a sudden? Yes—it was always too late."

"I'm sorry; I didn't mean to be prying. But I couldn't help wondering. Because, you see, everyone said it was too late to do anything for Welby after his accident. But it wasn't. He's very happy, and so am I. You'll see. I'm going to take you into his room now, before we go down to lunch. I leave Ben in there with him. They have their naps together."

"But Welby couldn't lift a finger for the baby!"

"He doesn't need to. Susie stays within call whenever I'm not, and looks in on them every few minutes. But having Ben on his bed gives Welby the feeling that he's taking care of the baby."

Veronique rose, adjusted her dress without disturbing the drowsy baby, who had reeled drunkenly off to sleep, and led the way into Welby's room. Isabel, who had shrunk from entering it, found another surprise in store for her. The place was flooded with sunshine and filled with flowers. Welby, clad in gay pyjamas, lying in his tester bed beneath a spotless counterpane with smooth

pillows under his head, did not look like a stricken man or even like a sick one. There was some colour in his face, and his manner was merry. He smiled at Isabel cordially.

"How are you? Mighty nice of you to come down. Helen and I have been talking our heads off. It'll be up to you to tell me your news after lunch. What do you think of this world-beater of ours?"

"He's a beautiful baby, Welby. And you're looking awfully well yourself."

"Coming on like a house afire. Couldn't help it with the kind of care I'm having. Darned good nurse I've got here, you know."

He looked from Isabel to Veronique. Isabel saw the expression in his face as he did so, and something smote hard at her vitals, as it had when Veronique asked if she were sorry she had never had a child.

Luncheon was a rather quiet meal. The food was delicious and the appointments perfect; but Veronique, though an ornamental and agreeable hostess, was not a loquacious one, and neither of her guests was particularly talkative either. Isabel, as always, was gracious and charming, but she was vaguely preoccupied with disturbing thoughts. Helen had conscientiously tried to talk to Welby in a sprightly way. But now that she felt no impulsion to make a show of gay spirits, she drooped perceptibly. It was not until Veronique began to discuss the history of the house, in connection with the carved mahogany and crested silver which Isabel had tactfully admired, that Helen asked a question on her own initiative.

"Does Hunter's Green have a ghost, Ronnie? I'm sure it must have."

Veronique laughed. "It's supposed to have, like all good Virginia houses! Several of them, in fact, for good measure! There's still two springs in the basement, just as there were when the house was built. You might like to go down there—it's quite quaint, with loopholes for shooting at Indians, and all that! Well, there's a story that a water fairy rises out of one of those springs and dances around it on still moonlit nights. But if anyone tries to watch her while she's doing it she runs lightly down to the other spring, leaps into it and disappears. I don't know why she doesn't save trouble by going right back into the one she comes from, but no one has ever explained that point to me."

"I think it's a pretty story. What about the other ghosts?"

"The other ghosts aren't fairies, they're hunters. They go stomping up the stairs very late at night, after everyone is in bed. Then they sit down and take off their riding-boots one by one. The boots fall on the floor, a long time apart, and after that there is a strange silence."

"Have you ever heard them?"

"No. But Welby says he has. What makes you so interested in ghosts, Helen?"

"Alfredo used to talk to me about them," Helen said hesitantly. "The ones in his Mexican home, I mean. He is very fond of his home, and he told me about the ghosts among other things. It seems there are several, just as there are here. One is a queer little creature called a *vivero*, which is covered with gold scales and has gold coins for eyes. Unless a *reboso* is thrown over him very quickly, he breathes poison all around him. A *reboso* is a sort of scarf. The *vivero* has some kind of connection with the treasure that is buried underneath the house—at least, according to legend. Sometimes a flame springs up over the place where this is, and when that happens you must cast a rosary into it. Then as soon as the flame has died down you must dig. But if you dig without first having sacrificed the rosary, the consequences may be very serious. You may be stricken with blindness as you search. Or you may find the treasure and see it turn to dust before your eyes."

"That's very thrilling, isn't it? What other ghosts are there besides the *vivero*?"

"There's a conquistador who walks along the parapet of the roof sometimes. And a lovely lady wearing a pure white dress and filmy black mantilla, who goes flitting from room to room."

"I should think you'd like to try to see them. I should think you'd go to Mexico this summer instead of to Europe. You might enjoy it a lot more than your mother did. Besides, you might be able to patch things up with Alfredo, after all."

"Oh, Veronique, of course I'd love to go there! But I can't. I told you all about that! And it's terribly kind of Isabel to take me to Europe with her. I'm sure we're going to have a wonderful time."

"Of course we are," Isabel said smoothly. "And we're not going ghost-hunting, either. How did we ever get on such a subject? Oh, I know—we were talking about those gorgeous silver compotes that were part of the dowry Althea Bainbridge brought with her when she married Ronald Hunter, and you said— Do go on talking about Althea, Veronique. I think she must have been simply fascinating."

Veronique reverted, readily enough, to the subject of Althea Bainbridge. She was fond of it herself, on account of the bracelet, and it served to while away the rest of the luncheon hour, and the time that she spent afterwards, with her guests, on the terrace overlooking the garden, where they drank their coffee. Eventually, glancing at her watch, she said the gentlemen of her family would be receiving again by this time, and suggested that Isabel should go up to see them while she took Helen out to the stables. But after Isabel, agreeably acquiescent, had strolled away, Veronique leaned forward impetuously and took Helen's hand.

"Listen, sweetness," she said. "Why *don't* you go to Mexico instead of Europe? Before it's too late?"

"What do you mean, before it's too late?"

"You haven't really given up hope, have you, of marrying Alfredo some day?"

"No-o-o. But I can't do anything about it now."

"Oh, for crying out loud!" Veronique said impatiently. It was her first real lapse into vernacular that day, and it was effective. Helen looked at her searchingly, with curious and timorous respect.

"Can I?" she inquired.

"I would, if I were you. I'd get on a train or a boat or something and just go."

"But Alfredo hasn't asked me to do anything like that. He hasn't even asked me to marry him. I told you how that was, too."

"Well, you don't suppose he'd be *sorry* to see you, do you, if you turned up there?"

"No. I'm sure he wouldn't be sorry. He still sends me flowers, Ronnie, regularly every week. Beautiful flowers, by air mail. And he didn't ask for a transfer after all. I've been waiting for a chance to tell you. I—I wrote him a little note and told him I was going to Europe and that it wouldn't be necessary. That is, I thought he could stretch his leave of absence, in some way, until I was gone. And he has. He's doing special work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City. But after I leave he's coming back to Washington."

"And then I expect when you come back to Washington, in the autumn, he'll go back to Mexico City and do some more special work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. You'll both keep on going through a sort of revolving door indefinitely. Is that it?"

"I don't know. I haven't got that far yet. I have to wait and see."

She spoke piteously. She could begin to feel an element of scorn in Veronique's sympathy, and she did not know how to combat it.

"And suppose while you're waiting to see, something happens to Alfredo? The way it did to Welby. Not a hunting accident, I don't mean that, but something—anything—that would keep you from marrying him. How would you feel then? All sorts of strange, violent things happen in Mexico. There's a revolution every few years and lots of people get hurt in them. Why, the Mexican President was assassinated just a little while ago, and killings of one kind or another go on all the time! How would you feel if Alfredo were killed?"

"Oh, Ronnie, you know how I'd feel!"

"Yes, I do. But you don't. If you did you'd manage, somehow, to marry him before night, as soon as you could get to him! Come on, let's not talk about it any more. Let's go out to the stables. I have a pony all picked out for Ben. She's a sweetie pie. I want you to see her."

It was when they were on their way back from the stables, which Helen had regarded abstractedly, that Veronique first noticed there was no car parked in the driveway. She had told Susie, beforehand, to be sure that Mrs. Windsor's chauffeur had a good lunch, and Susie was reliable about such details. But though the chauffeur might conceivably still be eating, this would not explain the absence of an automobile. Veronique asked Helen what had become of it.

"Oh, we didn't come in Isabel's car. Bob drove us down. He went on to Winchester. He'll be back pretty soon now."

"But why didn't you tell me? I'd have loved to have him for lunch, too!"

"Well, we didn't like to suggest that, too. Bob didn't feel sure how welcome he'd be. Would you really be glad to see him, Veronique?"

"Why, of course. Why shouldn't I be? Because I had a crush on him once? And he didn't have one on me? But that's silly, isn't it? I wouldn't hurt Bob's feelings for anything! He's an awfully good sort. But if he asked me, point-blank, I'd have to tell him that I haven't even thought of him for months. Tell him yourself, won't you? I mean, in a nice way, so he won't hesitate to come again. Because I'd like to have him, whenever he feels like it, through the summer, after you're gone. If it gets hot in town and he wants a week-end in the country."

She was still talking about it when the car swung into sight. She stopped and waved her hand, then ran forward to meet it. Bob, after waving in his turn, brought it to a stop with the sound of grinding brakes.

"Hello, there. How are you?"

"Hello yourself. Fine and dandy."

"You look like a million dollars."

"Thanks. I wish I had it. But I've got something better."

"I hope you get the world."

"Well, I have, just about. Come on in and see."

Isabel and Helen and Bob were all very silent while they were motoring back to Washington late that afternoon. They were obsessed with ideas. But none of them wanted to put these ideas into words.

Isabel was thinking about Ben. She could not remember that she had held a baby in her arms since she was a little girl herself. She had not realized that they were so sweet. She had been sincere when she told Veronique that though she wanted one of her own, momentarily, she had never done so before and that she was sure the feeling would pass as soon as she began to think about other things. But she seemed unable to think about any other things. Instead, she kept wondering whether it was, after all, too late. It was too late as far as poor Stephen was concerned, of course. But

who would need to know that, except Stephen and herself and her doctor? There might be guesses, and gossip, but, after all, what did these amount to? The gossip about Veronique had died down quickly enough. Suppose—suppose that after all these years she said yes to Giles instead of no? Suppose they went off quietly in the country somewhere together. There were plenty of places, in France, where they could go during the long summer. She could leave Helen in England. There would be any number of people in England who would be delighted to have Helen stay with them. Then she herself could go with Giles to some little Norman inn where they could hide themselves, as so many lovers had done before them, and in it their tardy, secret union would be consummated. If there were a child, Stephen would never publicly disown it. His pride would keep him from doing that. And it would constitute a permanent tie between herself and Giles. Not that he needed to be bound. Yet, if there were a child—if there were a child? Of course, there would be a child, sooner or later. Autumn was a long way off. Surely before autumn—

Helen was thinking about Alfredo, and about what Veronique had said concerning an accident, and the strange violent things that happened in Mexico. It had never occurred to her that there might be an accident or that Mexico was an especially dangerous place, where people were apt to get killed in revolutions. When the first agony of her grief had subsided, she had begun to think in vaguely hopeful terms of a distant future which would be happier and fuller than the dismal barren present. By and by, perhaps her mother would forget how intensely she disliked Mexico and come to think more kindly of Mexicans. By and by perhaps her father could afford to brave the Klan and take his chances when it came to having a Catholic for a son-in-law. After all, Veronique was a Catholic and a foreigner, and she was making Mrs. Hunter a very good daughter-in-law. Everyone said so, including Mrs. Hunter herself, though she had been annoyed about the baptism. Veronique was courageous and capable and kind. Welby was fond of her and proud of her; he leaned on her and trusted her and she did not fail him. Helen resolved to mention all this, when she next spoke to her parents about Alfredo. She resolved that they must be convinced of Alfredo's trustworthiness and loving kindness. Because she knew that somehow she must marry him after all. Not after a long time, but sometime soon. What was it Veronique had said? "Before night, as soon as you can get to him." Before night. Then they would be together when night came. The yawning gulf of this awful separation would not lie between them. They would comfort each other, as they loved each other—

Bob was thinking about Veronique. He had seen her hundreds of times before, and yet he felt as if he had never seen her before that day. Had he been blind not to notice what a gorgeous creature

she was? Or had she grown gorgeous during those long lonely winter months? He did not see how she could have. Gosh, what a terrible time she must've had! Alone with a cripple, carrying a child! And what a terrible time was ahead of her still! Married to a paralytic, buried in a vast orchard! Someone must help her to stand it, someone must get her out of it. He was a cur and a coward to have shrunk from going all these months to Hunter's Green. But from now on, he would go there often. She had said he would be welcome at any time. He had been a fool not to take advantage of all those week-ends, the year before. But there were other week-ends ahead of him now. A long succession of them began to march before his eager eyes. He would be very careful, of course, not to do anything Veronique could misinterpret, or anything that could possibly cause poor old Welby concern, if Welby happened to hear about it. He wouldn't make up to Ronnie, he wouldn't fool around her at all. But he'd show how much he admired her pluck, and what a loyal friend he was to her——

While Isabel and Helen and Bob were driving back to town, Veronique undressed the baby, sponged him off, and put on his little night shirt. Then she took him into his father's room to nurse him. It was still light enough in the room for Welby to see her. She sat down in another low rocker, near Welby, and crooned to the baby until he fell asleep. Then she put him in his cradle, and lay down herself, on Welby's bed. She had on a thin white dressing-gown and she looked cool and fresh, though it was a very warm night. The roses in the room made the air smell sweet, and a little breeze came in through the south windows. Veronique held Welby's hand and talked to him through the summer dusk.

But she did not tell him that after Isabel and Helen and Bob had gone back to Washington, she had received another visitor. The President of the People's and Planters' Bank in Winchester had come to tell her that unless she could pay the back interest charges within the next month, the mortgage on Hunter's Green would be foreclosed.

PART IV

CHAPTER IX

ISABEL WINDSOR fully intended to motor over to Hunter's Green again before sailing for Europe; but she was caught in the crush of last-minute preparations, which were complicated by all the farewell entertainments given in her honour, and she did not even have time to spend a few days in New York, as she had intended. She caught a midnight train, without so much as changing from the shimmering satin dress in which she had attended her last dinner party, and, after a hectic morning, was on the *Leviathan* at noon the same day.

Helen, for whom Isabel had reserved the Pullman compartment connecting with her own drawing-room, was more overcome than ever before by the luxury with which Isabel surrounded herself. After the train had started she sat on the hard little sofa, wedged in among multitudinous pieces of beautiful baggage, and looked on while Sarah, Isabel's maid, lifted her mistress's dress almost reverently over her head and unclasped the necklace and bracelets that Isabel was wearing. Sarah hung the dress, with precision, on a scented, padded hanger, and held out a filmy negligee for Isabel to put on. Then she opened a Russian leather case with a key which she kept secreted about her person, and placed the pearls carefully inside the jewel box, which she locked again before she knelt down to unbuckle Isabel's silver slippers and slide embroidered mules on her mistress's slender feet.

Helen had known for some time that Isabel never moved without a personal maid, but hitherto she had not seen Sarah actually in operation. She began to understand why Isabel never arrived at a party looking hot and harassed, as so many women did, and why everything she wore was so immaculate and so exquisite. Of course, Isabel was beautiful, to begin with, and she was naturally fastidious in her habits and unerring in her taste. But for all that, she would not have been able to present perpetually an appearance of flawless perfection without the ministrations of Sarah. Helen understood now, too, why Isabel had spoken so calmly about taking this midnight train directly after a party. There had been no last-minute packing for her to do, no final details connected with her departure to give her trouble. Sarah had seen to all that. No wonder Isabel still looked so dainty when Helen finally said good-night to her, and that she appeared so fresh and unwearied the next morning in a

fawn-coloured shantung suit and a white batiste blouse with fine frills down the front.

Helen herself was very tired. There had been no one to help her pack, and she had found it tiring to do so in the midst of all the parties. Moreover, she had worried a good deal about buying as many clothes as Isabel seemed to think necessary, and her shopping in search of bargains had proved exhausting also. She had known only a few girls who had gone to Europe, but they had spoken blithely about "bumming around with a couple of suitcases." She had known there would be no bumming around with Isabel, of course, nor would this have suited her; and she had supposed that the two suitcases would have to be large ones, as far as she was concerned, and that they would need to be supplemented by a hat-box and a dressing-bag at least. Zoe Wing had taken two large suitcases and a hat-box and a dressing-bag, besides her typewriter, when she started for Europe, and this had given Helen the idea. She knew that Zoe had been very proud at being able to fill so much baggage with clothes she had bought with money she had earned herself, and Helen could understand that; but she had never thought of a wardrobe trunk until Isabel had mentioned it as a matter of course—indeed, until Isabel had asked her conversationally how *many* wardrobe trunks she would have. Then Helen had said, in a startled voice, that she was sure she could get along with one, and Isabel had reminded her, still conversationally, that she would need to plan on five evening dresses for the boat alone, and that she had better not count on wearing any of her sports outfits more than once, either. Of course, the *Leviathan* was immaculate, but it was funny how many things could happen to clothes on board ship, and there would be no chance to get any cleaning done until they reached London.

Isabel had been right about the clothes, as Helen discovered almost immediately, though they spent their first afternoon in their suite, which had two big bedrooms, one for Isabel and one for Helen, on either side of the sitting-room, besides a small connecting cabin for Sarah, and a trunk room, on either side of the private entrance hall. Sarah did all of Isabel's unpacking, and supervised Helen's, with which she summoned a stewardess to help her; then she made the necessary arrangements for pressing and for clearing away the clutter caused by the *bon voyage* packages. But Isabel and Helen opened their presents themselves, and this consumed a good deal of time. Helen glowed with pleasure over the generosity with which she had been remembered. She had the great cellophane box of tropical flowers from Alfredo which she had expected to find; and besides this there were several bouquets from more casual beaux, two or three boxes of candy, a book and a hamper of fruit. But these offerings faded into insignificance beside the gifts which had been showered upon Isabel. The biggest flower box Helen had ever

seen had a large square sticker on top engraved with a picture of the White House, and Isabel said, in a pleased way but without surprise, that the President's wife was always wonderfully thoughtful about remembering her friends' sailing dates. Isabel arranged the long-stemmed red roses that emerged dewily from the waxed paper in the White House box; but she did not linger over them, for there were quantities of others. Each of the roses in a second box had a lacy frill around it; in another the layers of flowers were imbedded in rare and delicate ferns; the card attached to still another was itself tied with a miniature nosegay. One of the bouquets had a shield of ostrich feathers. Several of the containers—gilded baskets, aluminium vases, pottery jars—were works of art in themselves. It was only over such gifts as these that Isabel paused for more than the moment necessary to read the sender's card and hand it over to Sarah to be recorded on a neat list: "The Ambassador of France and Madame Marceau; lilacs and lilies." "The Secretary of the Navy and Mrs. Vaughn; carnations." "Representative and Mrs. Duncan; pansies." Several sheets of paper had been covered before they were through. Then Isabel selected some fresh gardenias to replace those, still fresh, which she was already wearing, and turned away from her task with a few final instructions to Sarah.

"Have the steward take one of those vases filled with flowers from the White House to the Captain's table and keep the others here. Arrange the rest of the red roses around this room, put the pansies on my dressing-table, and save out another bouquet for this evening—I don't care which. Send all the other flowers down to the cold-storage room until I need them; but remember there's no excuse for having anything faded around, with a supply like this. I'll have my bath at seven-thirty; I want to try out those new salts, in the little square tablets, scented with heliotrope. And I'll wear the green lace tonight— Shall we go up on deck for a little turn, Helen? Sarah has seen to the chairs, but I like to locate them myself, too. Then you might have a swim before dinner. I don't feel in the mood myself, but the pool's really very nice."

The chairs were easily discovered, with the eager assistance of an alert deck steward; they were located in the very best possible place on the great promenade deck, and Isabel decided that she and Helen might as well permit the steward to install them there, wrapped in plaid rugs, for tea before they began their little turn. Both the tea and the turn were constantly interrupted. It seemed to Helen that Isabel knew everyone on board and that everyone was enormously important. The Secretary of State and his wife stopped to speak to them cordially; so did the High Commissioner of Haiti and his wife, the American Ambassador to Spain, the Under-Secretary of Commerce, and half a dozen senators and representatives, both accompanied and unaccompanied. A congressman from

Kansas City, who was something of a rough diamond, whispered jovially to Isabel that a gangster and his girl who were constituents of his were aboard, and that he had found the gangster arguing violently with the purser because they did not have a better cabin; he, the congressman, had fortunately been able to persuade the purser to "fix them up," despite the overcrowded condition of the ship. He was glad, because the gangster always delivered a lot of votes—— Isabel smiled politely at his story, though she did not congratulate the congressman with as much effusion over his successful manipulation as he seemed to expect, and presently he drifted off. But when Senator Hyde came and sat down beside her a few minutes later she was unmistakably cool in her reception of him, and his stay was even briefer.

"He certainly isn't lacking in nerve," Isabel said to Helen after he had gone. "Of course, he pretends that the girl who was found in his private office, dead drunk and practically naked, had been 'planted' there by the prohibitionists because he is advocating the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. But I'm not so sure. His reputation with women was pretty unsavoury, even before that happened. He has the next office to your father's, hasn't he? What does Senator Morton think of him?"

"I think they've always been friendly with each other," Helen answered. "Not that we see much of the Hydés. They're ever so much richer than we are, and Mother's had to admit she couldn't keep up with Mrs. Hyde. I think it was a good deal of a disappointment to her, and Mrs. Hyde wasn't as helpful as she might have been herself. This hasn't affected the Senator's attitude towards Father at all, though, and one of his old friends is in Father's office a lot. He goes back and forth from one office to the other. His name is Mr. Puffleberger. I've never understood his business very clearly, but it seems he represents one of the big Western brewing concerns in Washington. At least, it's a concern that used to make beer. Now it manufactures ginger ale and drinks like that. Mr. Puffleberger has really been very nice to us. He sent us up cases of ginger ale several times. He doesn't agree with Senator Hyde on the subject of repeal himself. He said he thinks it's a dead issue. He can't understand why his firm bothers to keep him on in Washington."

"Then why does he spend so much time in Senator Hyde's office?"

"Why, I told you! They're old friends. They grew up in the same town. So it's natural they should keep up the acquaintance, isn't it? Mr. Puffleberger's really a very interesting talker. Once, when he had brought some of the new near-beer his firm's manufacturing now into the office, Bob asked him home to dinner, just on the spur of the moment. Father and Mother were going out, but he didn't seem to mind. He sat and talked to Bob and me.

He knew all about cotton and corn being the chief products of Arkansas, and he explained the connection that the beer business had with the agricultural interests, and how the producers of malt and hops have suffered as a result of the prohibition amendment, or, rather, the Volstead Act. Of course, he knows Father is a dry; that is, publicly he has to be. Mr. Puffleberger didn't say anything that would hurt our feelings or start an argument. But he did ask if Bob didn't feel some wealthy industrialists who are inimical to agriculture had a lot to do with depriving working men of five-cent beer while they themselves bought bootleg by the car-load. And Bob said he was right. I could see that Bob was very much interested."

"I hope he wasn't too much interested, Helen dear."

"Why, Isabel?"

"Because I'm very much afraid that your kind, entertaining Mr. Puffleberger is a very powerful, wily lobbyist."

"But he couldn't make trouble for Father or for Bob, even if he were, could he? I mean, nothing could be 'planted' on Father, could it, the way it was on Senator Hyde?"

"I told you I didn't believe that was a 'plant,' Helen. I believe the girl who was found in Senator Hyde's office had been there a good many times before, that he knew her very well indeed. Your father's private life is beyond suspicion. There's no possible chance of his being mixed up in a sexual scandal. Put the idea of that straight out of your pretty little head."

"But you think he might get mixed up with a person like Mr. Puffleberger?"

"Oh, I don't believe so. He's a man of great general integrity. And he has Bob to help him ward off undesirables. Anyway, you mustn't worry about that now. You must come and have your swim before dinner. You'll be sure to meet some nice young men at the pool. I want you to have plenty of partners when the dancing begins. I don't want your first night out to be dull."

Helen had plenty of partners and the first night out was not dull, nor was any night thereafter. But the sense of oppression which had surged over her, at the sight of Isabel being divested of satin and jewels by an obsequious maid in a Pullman drawing-room, continued to overwhelm her. She did not feel light-hearted and gay, as she had expected to feel on shipboard. The *Leviathan* was too huge and too ostentatious to give her that feeling. Indeed, there were many times when she found it hard to realize that she was on board a ship at all. Even the great promenade deck was so deep and so thoroughly enclosed with glass that from her chair she could not see the waves. She had to get up, and walk far over to the little square windows, which were usually shut, in order to do this; and then she was in the way of the pedestrians who were

obsessed with knowledge that "four times around made a mile," and wanted to walk it out, though why this should be any more thrilling at sea than on land Helen did not comprehend. The pedestrians annoyed her by their futile display of energy and their evident disinclination to swerve slightly to one side, for the convenience of anyone who wanted to look out of a window. Eventually she went back to her chair and picked up a book.

She swam in the pool every day, and she played deck tennis and ping-pong and shuffleboard to a certain extent, but she was not especially good at sports or especially fond of them, and Isabel, who was candidly indifferent to them, did not join in them at all. She had never needed to guard her figure, and she liked to spend her time betting on the ship's run and playing bridge and carrying on long semi-private conversations with important officials. She understood the political scene extremely well, having lived close to it all her life, and there was no one aboard ship, from the Secretary of State down, who was not glad to chat with her. She never made a gesture of dismissal towards Helen, when one of the dignitaries of the day drifted along the deck and dropped down in a chair beside her; but Helen knew that Isabel would rather be alone with these great men and always found a pretext for drifting away in her own turn.

Sometimes these days seemed rather long to her, for most of the young girls and young men quickly grouped themselves into congenial couples, according to the immemorial custom of the sea, and with the thought of Alfredo uppermost in her mind and the longing for him tugging at her heartstrings, she had discouraged the overtures that would have included her in any such arrangement. But the evenings passed comparatively quickly. She and Isabel were always invited to a cocktail party, held in some private suite, before dinner, for the *Leviathan*, officially dry, was well provided with private stock. She did not care much for the cocktail parties, which were just as noisy and overcrowded as the ones in Washington, but she really enjoyed the Captain's table, and was thrilled at having been asked to sit there. She could not understand how Isabel could have taken it for granted that this would be their appointed place.

"Are you always at the Captain's table, Isabel?"

"Why, yes. That is, I can't remember ever taking a trip when I wasn't."

"But, Isabel, it seems funny to me that you should be so certain you would be. After all, there are about five hundred people on this ship. I suppose there have been at least a hundred on every ship you've been on. And only about a dozen can sit at the Captain's table."

"Yes, I know. But I've always been one of the dozen."

What would it be like, Helen wondered during the moments when she stood beside one of the little windows looking out at the

waves, to feel, as Isabel did, securely welcome in any society, at any time and place. Isabel had not been a rich girl, Helen knew that; but in spite of the straitened circumstances of her youth, Isabel had always "belonged." She had always taken obsequious attention as a matter of course, too. Though Sarah had not come into her life until after her marriage, the coloured servants whom her parents had always managed somehow to retain had evidently waited on her hand and foot. Helen had been with Isabel to the stately old house in Georgetown which had been the family home for generations; it had been restored and modernized now, with Stephen Windsor's money; but Isabel had told Helen that when she was a girl there had been no central heating and very little plumbing in it, and that Samantha, the old "body servant," had come to her room every morning before she was up to build the fire, and had brought hot water in cans over three flights of stairs to fill the round tin tub placed in front of the hearthstone.

"It was perfectly archaic, of course," Isabel had said. "All our friends and neighbours had furnaces and porcelain tubs by that time. But I can't say it ever inconvenienced me. I didn't see what difference it made whether heat came up through a register or not, if Samantha put enough wood on the fire, or whether water ran out of a faucet or not, if she carried it. I used to stay cuddled down in my bed until the room was lovely and warm, and then I got to the tub in one leap, shedding my nightie as I stepped into the water. I loved the feeling of warmth on my bare skin, coming from the open fire, and from the sun streaming in through the bay window, too. The bay window was a hideous excrescence that's been taken off now, like the rest of the Victorian adornments. But I loved it. I loved everything about my room. I have never seen a bathroom where I could get the feeling that gave me. Stephen had a fireplace put into my bathroom when he built the Massachusetts Avenue house for me. But the bathroom walls are tiled and the window faces north. Tile may be a great deal more sanitary than flowered wallpaper, but it isn't half as cheerful. And there's absolutely no substitute for space and sunshine."

Helen had been fascinated with the recreated image of Isabel, slim and lovely, stepping into the water on the hearthstone, and standing there, warmed by the flames and the sun; gradually she persuaded her friend to reveal other aspects of her early life. She learned that Isabel had gone to a private day school, where only French was spoken, and to a small private dancing school, where the boys sat on one side of the room and the girls on the other, meeting only when they were actually in motion, and where the teacher wore "the last straight front corsets to survive" and a high pompadour, equally inflexible. She never went out alone; Samantha always accompanied her. Every evening, at tea-time, she went into the drawing-room to see her parents and her parents' friends for a

few minutes; but she had her early supper alone upstairs until she was half-grown. When she was ten, and again when she was fifteen, she had been taken abroad for a year, and had gone to school first in Lausanne and afterwards in Florence. Somewhere in between the two she had been confirmed, and at that time she had been so much moved by ritual that she had briefly considered going into an Anglican Sisterhood. This had alarmed her parents, whose attitude towards religion was more showy than substantial. To divert her mind from a vocation, they had permitted her to receive callers and to accept invitations from young men—under proper chaperonage, of course—earlier than they had intended. The wife of the Commandant in Annapolis, with whom she had stayed for her first portentous June Week, had proved more liberal and lenient than her parents had expected; that was how she had managed to have her only taste of freedom. When Stephen Windsor proposed, almost immediately afterwards, her father and mother considered it an answer to prayer.

"But were you in love with him?" Helen had ventured to ask.

"No, my dear. I was in love with Giles Arnold. I thought you knew that by this time. But my mother had a 'little talk' with me. She told me that no girl of really refined instincts permitted a physical attraction to influence her. She shrank from using such a phrase in speaking to me, but to her regret she saw it was necessary. She convinced me that my lack of restraint had probably already cost me Giles' 'real regard,' and that the surest way to restore my own self-respect would be to marry someone else. I never saw Stephen alone for fifteen minutes on end all the time I was engaged to him. Of course that wasn't very long. He and my parents were agreed on the desirability of an early marriage. It saved them the expense of a *début*, and it shortened his anxiety regarding my further emotional awakening. He wanted a very young, very dazed, completely virginal bride. He was ready to pay good money to get one. My parents saw to it that he wasn't cheated. They didn't mind having me utterly defrauded—and utterly defiled."

"Oh, Isabel! How horrible that you should feel this way!"

"It's horrible that I should have spoken this way. I've never done it before. You shouldn't have asked me so many questions. Stephen's given me a great deal. I'm not unmindful of it."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know. I won't do it again."

For the first time there was a little rift between the two. Helen filled it in by going to look, more and more frequently, at the waves, and thinking about Isabel as she did so. It was hard for her to picture such a background and such an upbringing as Isabel had had, because these were so utterly different from her own. But the endeavour enthralled her. She did not feel bereft while Isabel filled in the same interval with an increasing number of confidential conversations, on political subjects, with great men.

Outwardly at least, Isabel quickly recaptured her charming serenity, nor was there anything about the conduct of her life to indicate inner turmoil. She suggested the sybarite rather than the sufferer. Sarah massaged her to make up for the exercise she disliked and neglected, and she lay contentedly for hours, while the maid manipulated her muscles and stroked her skin. She always bathed twice and often three times a day—when she rose in the morning, when she dressed for dinner, and when she went to bed at night. She wore nothing but the finest handkerchief linen, delicately edged with real lace, next to her person, and the same garment was never put on twice without laundering between times. Her stockings were like gossamer; she did not expect them to last more than a day. The drawers where she kept her underlinen were scented with sachet, and sachet bags also hung in her wardrobes, among her dresses. She used no make-up beyond a little fine powder, having the wisdom to leave her beautiful pale skin alone; but the perfumes on her toilet table, like the salts in her bath, were the rarest and best that could be bought; their fragrance was faint, but persistent and haunting. She had dozens of hats and dozens of pairs of shoes, beautifully kept in trunks especially made for them. Her clothes looked simple, but they were delusive. When she walked into a room, dressed in a flat white crêpe or a pastel-coloured satin, with ropes of pearls around her slim neck and a diamond star in her dark hair, the effect was startling. She made the other women who were robed in lamé or covered with sequins, and whose flashing bracelets encircled their arms from wrist to elbow, look garish and tawdry. She was the epitome of elegance, the incarnation of refinement.

Increasingly, Helen marvelled at her, increasingly she admired her. She glowed with pride when she followed Isabel into the great dining-room at night, walking down the centre of it, watching to see in which directions Isabel bowed and smiled as she went along, in order to bow and smile in her own turn, and finally taking her place, which but for Isabel's prestige she would never have had, at the genial Captain's table. The Secretary of State and Mrs. Standish, the High Commissioner of Haiti and Mrs. Merrill, and American Ambassador to Spain, Mr. Nesbit, Senator and Mrs. Hyde, and another senatorial couple, the Winslows, made up the favoured group. Mr. Crowder, the Congressman from Kansas City who was something of a rough diamond, had expected to install himself and his wife in places of honour also, and it was rumoured about the ship that he was extremely resentful because Isabel and Helen were using up two seats that by right should have been assigned to him. The Crowders sat at the First Officer's table nearby, and talked in loud voices, telling smutty stories and laughing uproariously. Helen disliked Mrs. Crowder intensely, but she could not avoid the temptation of glancing at her from time to time, for the Congress-

man's wife not only wore a different dress of startling design every night, but a different wrap as well, and the effect was staggering. One evening she was sheathed in sable, the next in ermine, and the next in chinchilla, while huge collars of fluffy fox in shades to match the different coats swathed her short fat neck. Helen could not help wondering whether Mrs. Crowder would be able to display every variety of priceless fur that there was before the voyage was over. Finally, covertly turning in the direction of the next table, she gave a startled exclamation before she could smother it.

"Isabel! Do you see what Mrs. Crowder has on?"

Isabel, with a slight gesture indicating the desirability of restraint, went on talking to General Merrill. It was not until after they had returned to their suite that night, and, assisted by Sarah, that she had slipped, as usual, from her evening-dress to a negligee, before sitting down to talk over the events of the day, that she gave Helen a direct answer.

"You asked me at dinner whether I noticed what Mrs. Crowder had on. I thought you were talking about another fur coat, and of course I couldn't turn around to look at her then, anyway. But I did notice, after we went up to the Social Hall, that she was wearing a magnificent emerald necklace. Is that what you meant?"

"Yes. Haven't you seen it, or one just like it, before?"

"It did look vaguely familiar to me. But it isn't likely there could be two necklaces like that, and I certainly never saw Mrs. Crowder before I got on this ship. You know she's never been accepted socially in Washington and no wonder."

"It was Ronnie's necklace. She hardly ever wore it, because it was so elaborate; it didn't suit her style. But it was one of her greatest treasures just the same. It used to belong to Napoleon's beautiful sister, Pauline Bonaparte; you know, the one who married Prince Borghese. But it was Napoleon himself who gave it to Pauline. When she died she bequeathed it to the Contessa Amelia Alfieri, whom she'd known ever since she was a little girl and dearly loved. It was the most precious heirloom in the Alfieri family."

"Are you certain you aren't mistaken, Helen?"

"I'm absolutely positive. She took it out of her jewel box one day and showed it to me. I held it in my own hands. She must have sold it. Oh Isabel, I'm afraid she's having a terribly hard time! I know she'd never have done that, except as a last resort."

"No, I don't suppose she would have. It must have hurt her pride terribly to part with it. Though jewellers arrange these things very tactfully—one regular customer will bring in something to be sold, on commission, and another regular customer will buy it, without ever knowing who the original owner was. In this case though, the history of the necklace would add a great deal to its value. So perhaps Veronique told the history. I hope she got her money's worth, if she did."

"What would be her money's worth?"

"Oh, fifty or sixty thousand dollars at least. But if she had to put through the sale in a hurry, she probably didn't get half that much."

"Poor Ronnie. I'm desperately sorry for her, Isabel, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm sorry for her, in a way. I haven't forgotten what it's like to be hard up. But I don't think Ronnie's altogether unhappy, Helen. I think she feels she has compensations. She's very fond of the baby, you know."

"Yes, but there's something sad about that. Because I think Ronnie had made up her mind to have a large family. She told me so once when we were talking—well, you know the way girls do talk about such things sometimes. She said that if she ever cared about a man at all, she knew it wouldn't be half-heartedly. It would be a lot. And she said she hoped he'd love her a lot, too and that if he did she knew just what it would mean. She wasn't afraid of having children. She said she thought a girl who avoided it was a shirk and a coward. And a fool, too. She said nothing would induce her to spoil the most wonderful experience of her life by robbing it of spontaneity or completion for fear of what might follow. She said that—that when she was with her husband, she knew she would feel there wasn't anyone in the world except him, that she would be so enraptured she wouldn't even remember there might be a baby until afterwards. But that when she did remember about it, when she found she was going to have one, she would always be glad, even if she had one every year, because it would be the result of love. And now she can't ever have another."

"Well, she has one, anyway. It's evidently all she can afford to take care of too, or more. So she'd better be satisfied. And I must say, Helen—— Really, the things girls talk about nowadays! I'm only fourteen years older than you are, and I wouldn't have dreamed of saying what you've just said to me to any of my friends. As far as that goes, I wouldn't dream of doing it now. It makes me uncomfortable. So suppose we change the subject—— Are you glad the voyage is almost over? I am, rather. I'm always glad to get to England. Though, of course, it's a nuisance being asked prying questions about why you've come and exactly how long you mean to stay. Imagine telling the truth if you really were going for some nefarious purpose. I knew a young man once who was so irritated that he answered, 'I'm going to murder the King and Queen, and then I'll move into Buckingham Palace and spend the rest of my life!' He nearly landed in jail for the rest of his life! The English don't appreciate our sense of humour—the Customs are a nuisance, too, but of course, someone will come down from the Consulate to meet us, so they won't be too tiresome. And Sarah is really awfully good about all those details. We'll be on the train and off to London almost before we know it. Well, good-night, dear, and

don't worry too much about Ronnie. If she never wore the necklace, perhaps it's just as well somebody has it who can enjoy it."

Helen was a little hurt at Isabel's tone. She thought Isabel was unfeeling, as far as Ronnie was concerned. She had no way of knowing that her random remarks on possessing and being possessed had been deeply disturbing to Isabel, or why they should be. She was conscious of the little rift again the next day, and she herself was glad that the voyage was almost at an end. She did not mind the turmoil of landing, when it came. She thought it was very exciting. It was unbelievable that a dock, and a station, and porters, and news-stand, and tea baskets, and a train could all be so different from the way they were at home, in a place where people spoke the same language—or almost the same language!—as in the United States! It was all very novel and very surprising. And then, in addition to everything else, their arrival had been marked by such a delightful surprise.

She had asked Isabel, beforehand, if she expected anyone to meet them; and Isabel had said no, only someone from the Consulate, one of the young Vice-Consuls, probably, who was used to being victimized by being sent down to meet ships that got in at ungodly hours and seeing irritated travellers smoothly through the Customs. Helen had never known any Vice-Consuls, but she instantly decided that the young man who threaded his way among the passengers, while they were still on deck, and after one searching glance at Isabel, greeted her cordially, could not possibly be one. He did not look as she imagined Vice-Consuls must; he did not even look like an American. He looked exactly as she had always hoped and expected all very nice young Englishmen would look, but as she had somehow feared they might not. Isabel seemed extremely glad to see this young man, and after a searching glance of her own, Helen did not wonder.

"Guy Grenville! Of all persons! Where on earth did you come from? And how did you know I was on this ship?"

"Mrs. Windsor! My dear lady! I came from Egypt—or more immediately from Star Hundred. And our justly famed secret intelligence—can you doubt that it would fail to pass on to me such a priceless item as the news of your arrival?"

They laughed, together. Isabel, a little belatedly, turned to Helen.

"Oh, I'm sorry—Mr. Grenville, this is Helen Morton, who's travelling with me. Her father's a very important senator and her mother's very important, too—not to mention her brother! But they've been good enough to lend her to me for the summer. Helen, Mr. Grenville and I first met in Singapore, when I was going around the world with some friends a few years ago. His father was the Colonial Governor of the Straits Settlements, and we had the best time, in Government House!"

"You'll have to come to Cairo in the autumn—we'll give you a

good time there, too. Pater is British High Commissioner now. But meanwhile my mother and I hope you'll come to Star Hundred. She's had to get away from the heat for a bit, and I'm on leave myself. You're not really in any hurry to get up to London, are you?"

"We're being presented at the last Court, and, of course, we have every sort of engagement, beforehand, and our rooms reserved at Brown's and all that. But I don't know—— It's very kind of you and Lady Grenville—— Would you like a week-end at an English country house, Helen?"

"Oh, I would a lot! That is, if Mr. Grenville is sure he wants us."

She had been pleasantly conscious of his light but appraising glance, and the ease of his manner all the time they had been talking. The confusion, fast mounting to pandemonium, which raged all around them, did not seem to affect him in the least. He managed to detach himself from the crowd and to stand apart from it, unjostled, unperturbed and friendly. At the same time he also shielded them from it. Now he answered with a brevity which strangely enough did not detract at all from his cordiality.

"Oh rather!" was all he said.

CHAPTER X

THE well-ordered tranquillity of Star Hundred was infinitely soothing to Helen's troubled spirit. Surrounded, as she was, by homely creature comforts, and unharassed by strain of any sort, she began to relax.

She slept soundly all night, and she was still sound asleep when Emily, the apple-cheeked little maid who had been assigned to her, came to her bedside with early morning tea. The tea was very strong, and, as tea, Helen did not like it very well; neither could she see the sense in being waked, merely to learn that she could go back to sleep again for another hour if she wished. But she was so intrigued with Emily and the tea-tray that she rubbed the sleep from her eyes to look at them. She sat up, surrounded by big square pillows, under the canopy of draped chintz which surmounted her bed, and watched Emily making the rounds of the room.

Emily drew back the chintz window curtains, which matched the chintz canopy, and set a small copper kettle down in the china basin on the washstand, which had a marble top, but which was also draped with chintz. The copper kettle was filled with boiling hot water, and dislodged the china ewer, which matched the basin, and which was filled with cold water. There were several other odd china pieces on the washstand also, among them a long shallow dish, in which, it appeared, you were supposed to lay your toothbrush down flat, and a deep, round dish, in which you were supposed to place your sponge. Helen had never possessed a sponge, and the lack of this had puzzled Emily when she unpacked Helen's things, just as her respectful query about it had puzzled Helen. But now they were getting used to each other's ways.

After Emily had drawn back the curtains she built the fire, using a copper coal-scuttle. She knelt in front of the hearthstone, regarding the grate anxiously until it showed unmistakable signs of illumination. Then she rose from her knees and approached the bed again. She carefully replaced the tea cosy, which Helen had laid aside, on the teapot, though this was now empty. It appeared that a teapot, irrespective of its contents or the lack of these, must always be kept hot, whereas the toast was left to shiver, so to speak, on its rack.

"Shall I fill your bath at eight-thirty as usual, miss?"

"Yes, please, Emily."

"Thank you, miss. Will that be all?"

"Yes. Thank *you*, Emily."

Emily always looked a little startled when Helen thanked her for

anything. Apparently she was not used to being thanked. She withdrew, and Helen, enjoying the effects of the tea more than she had the tea itself, rose and began to move around the room. She did not understand why hot water should be brought to the washstand when within an hour she would be led down a long corridor, past many other bedrooms, to a room where a bath, containing water scented with lemon verbena salts, would be awaiting her use. But when she told Emily not to bother to bring hot water to her room in the morning, Emily looked at her with distressed eyes and, after thanking her, scuttled away, only to return, the next morning, with her customary burden.

Helen spoke to Isabel about the service Emily was giving her, and asked if it were not similar to what Isabel had told her of having in her own youth. She had been so intrigued with Isabel's stories of the sunny bedroom in the Georgetown house and the tub in front of the fire that she had hoped Isabel would say yes, in order that she might feel a certain fellowship of experience with her. But Isabel had answered rather coolly that it was a silly question; that the only similarity between coloured servants and English servants was that both were excellent. She did not add that Helen would know this without asking if she had been used to any kind of decent service, but Helen understood the implication.

She was not unduly downcast by it, however. She merely decided to ask Isabel fewer questions in the future, and to find out more things for herself. The pleasure she took in her verbena-scented bath was unclouded by the fact that no one had ever prepared baths for her before, and she insisted on dressing herself, though this was another eccentricity which she could see was perplexing to Emily. But she took extra pains with her hair and her stocking seams, so that no one should think she was carelessly groomed, and she tied the laces of her small, serviceable shoes—beautifully polished for the first time in her life—in tight little bows that did not loosen, even if she tramped all day. Then she went downstairs to breakfast, leaving Emily to "tidy up" the chintzy room, which, as far as Helen could see, was completely tidy already.

She had lacked appetite for a long time, but now she approached the dining-room with eagerness and ate her breakfast with relish. It was such fun to lift the covers from a long line of dishes on a sideboard and discover what was underneath; the contents of the dishes were so unfamiliar and so surprisingly delicious! She had never heard oatmeal called porridge before, and the steaming succulent mixture which she scooped up for herself now bore no resemblance to the dry cereal which the Mortons' maid-of-all-work shook carelessly from a carton a few minutes before it was served. She had never eaten kidney stew or gooseberry jam before. Now she devoured them both, washing down the kidneys with more tea, which she found preferable to what passed for coffee, and spreading

the gooseberry jam liberally on more cold toast. Lady Grenville, like Isabel Windsor, never came down to breakfast, but Guy always did, and he helped Helen to lift the covers of the dishes and to decide what she wanted.

"Just a little kippered herring as well? Right you are! Your plate still looks rather empty. Now what else?"

"If I could have a glass of ice water everything would be perfect."

"I don't know that the fishmonger has brought the ice yet this morning. But the water in the carafe's very fresh. Try it!"

He poured it out for her, smiling. Secretly Helen thought the water was far from fresh. Indeed, it tasted lukewarm to her. But she did not argue the point, because everything else about breakfast was so pleasant. Her fellow-guests greeted her agreeably as they drifted in and out of the dining-room, making casual plans for the day. They were all a good deal older than she was, and, though occasionally one of them asked if she would care to play a game of tennis or a few holes of golf, none of them pressed her when she said no. Apparently neither the Grenvilles nor their visitors regarded "company" very seriously. It was taken for granted that on Sunday everyone would go to at least one service at the parish church, that every day an immense amount of time would be devoted to outdoor sports, and that attendance at meals, with the exception of breakfast, should be punctilious—indeed, there was a regular ritual at dinner-time. But, apart from this, everyone came and went at will.

This freedom of movement gave Helen a peculiar sense of both peace and pleasure. At first she stayed fairly close to the house. She liked the feel of the thick carpets under her feet, the atmosphere of spaciousness and quiet in the big rooms, and the warmth of the mellow wainscoting. Then she discovered that she liked the outside just as well, that the red bricks of which the house was built looked warm, too, while its white stone trimmings gave it brightness and elegance. The silky lawns were fully as soft under her feet as the French carpets. Beyond the lawns and the clumps of yews and copper beeches with which they were studded were the gardens, and these were gorgeous, especially the rose-gardens. She wandered up and down the well-kept paths between the flower beds aimlessly and contentedly. She found an elderly, garrulous gardener and struck up a conversation with him. He amused her, just as Emily did—well, not in exactly the same way, but quite as much. She enjoyed talking with him long before she was in the mood to talk to any of her fellow-guests.

After she grew agreeably familiar with the grounds and gardens, she ventured into the woods. There was a little lake, covered with lilies, on the edge of these, and a rustic pavilion at either end of the lake. After she discovered the pavilions, she took a book and some stationery with her, thinking that she might sit down to read

and write in one of them. But though she left the book and the stationery there, she herself went on, after all. The woods gave no impression of wildness; they looked more like a great park. The trees were neatly trimmed, the paths clearly outlined. She would have gone on for a long time, without fatigue or fear, had not a shower come up, so heavy that it pelted down beneath the shelter of the evergreens and oaks. Then she went back to the pavilion where she had left her belongings. When she reached it she found that her host, who evidently had been similarly caught, was sitting there looking through her book.

"Cheerio!" he said, rising, with his usual pleasant smile. "I hope you're not soaked? The weather's been fine for several days now, so we should have expected this. Besides, the glass has been falling all the morning. I ought to have warned you at luncheon."

"You couldn't very well, could you, when you didn't know what I was planning to do?"

"Well, I might have suspected. I've noticed that you've been getting about a bit more than you did at first. You've been ill, haven't you? Before you came across, I mean? I'm most frightfully sorry."

"No, not ill exactly. I had a sort of breakdown." She flushed, stopped, and then went on, trying to change the subject. "Do you always expect rain after you've had a few pleasant days?" she inquired. "Isn't that an awfully gloomy outlook?"

"No. Merely practical. Rather American in feeling, as a matter of fact. Wasn't it Longfellow who said, 'Into each life some rain must fall'?"

"I don't know. I never read Longfellow. He wasn't one of the poets we took up at Mortonville High School."

The corners of Guy Grenville's mouth twitched slightly. "But you like poetry," he said. "Else you wouldn't be bringing the 'Oxford Book of Verse' out into the woods with you."

"It was on my bedside table, instead of a detective story. The only other book was a New Testament. I've read that already, so I thought I'd try the poetry."

Guy Grenville put back his head and laughed. If there had been any mockery in his laughter, Helen would have felt hurt. But there was not. So she laughed, too.

"You might find that the New Testament would bear re-reading," Guy said. "But I see we need pointers in the entertainment of guests from the States. I've already spoken to the fishmonger about the ice. He'll bring some early every morning after this. I noticed that the water from the carafe didn't fill the bill at all for you. Now I'll speak to my mother about supplies of reading material for the guest-rooms. I'll tell her murder mysteries are essentials in the lives of quiet young girls. How are you hitting it off with the mater, by the way?"

"Oh, wonderfully! I think she's a lovely lady."

Helen spoke sincerely, but a little self-consciously. She and Isabel had been having an argument about Lady Grenville, whom Isabel did not especially admire. In fact, she had characterized their hostess as "frumpish, beefy and bossy."

"I know she buys her clothes at Revell's, but something happens to them when she puts them on. As for her skin, it's a sight. You'd think she would have lost that chapped look in the tropics. But I guess nothing makes an Englishwoman turn pale."

"I like her looks. I think they're distinguished. Of course she isn't stylish, the way you are, Isabel, but she does have elegance; her clothes suit her. And her colouring's just like her son's—not blond exactly, but sort of fair and fresh. You think he's attractive, don't you?"

"Oh yes, I think he's attractive now. But he'll probably get beefy, too, later on. Those fair fresh English complexions don't last."

"Why, you just said——"

"Oh, Helen, don't argue with me, and please listen to me! I said Englishwomen didn't *lose* their colour. They keep getting more and more. It changes from rosiness to ruddiness with the passing years. Just as the sweet shy ways they have when they're young turn to arrogance later on. I only hope that won't happen with you. You don't look and act unlike an English girl yourself."

"It would please me a lot if I thought I did. And I don't think Lady Grenville is arrogant. I think she's dignified. *Really* dignified. Not just trying to be, like Mrs. Endicott."

It was the memory of this conversation that made Helen self-conscious, when Guy asked her how she was getting along with his mother. But he was not self-conscious in the least, and presently he reverted to the subject which they had previously been discussing.

"Now that you've tried out the 'Oxford Book of Verse,' why don't you 'take up' Longfellow by yourself?" he inquired. "Or, if you'd like it better, let me read some of his poems aloud to you. We could make a dash for the house, and then we could have a spot of tea by ourselves in the library for a change, instead of having it with all the others in the great hall. We wouldn't be disturbed, and we could read until the dressing-bell rings. What about it?"

"I think you're very kind to bother with an ignorant little girl from Arkansas."

"I think you're frightfully good to give me a chance to see something of you. I was beginning to be afraid you never would."

"Did you—— Have you wanted to, all the time?"

"Oh rather! But I got the feeling you wanted to be alone. Now come along. No, don't be silly. Of course you're going to have my coat around you. It's a very good coat. I've worn it for more than ten years."

It was possibly due to the efficacy of Guy's aged tweed that Helen

did not feel chilled by the rain. She felt refreshed by it instead. She told Guy so, while they were eating their scones and drinking their tea in front of the library fire. She liked the library better than she did the great hall, where there were rather too many ancestral portraits for her complete comfort. These bygone Grenvilles looked down from their gilded frames stiffly and severely. But the library, with its old etchings and well-worn books, was very friendly.

"I say, it's very sporting of you to tell me that you didn't mind the rain," Guy said, offering her another unfamiliar delicacy, which proved to be a crumpet. "Americans are usually so crushing when they talk to us about our weather. You'd think it never rained outside of England—— Do you care for the country? That is, generally speaking?"

"I've never been in the real country much. I lived in a small town before we went to Washington. We stayed in Mortonville summer and winter both. Except that once in a while we took a little trip to the Gulf, or hired a cottage on a lake for a couple of weeks in August. Then when Father was Governor of Arkansas, of course we went to Little Rock. But since we've been in Washington I've seen more of the country. I've visited several times at Hunter's Green, a place near Berryville, in Virginia. I like that a lot."

"Berryville! But I've an old friend living near there, too, Dabney Turberville. He grew up in England. His family rented the shooting-box next to ours. Do you know him?"

"Why, yes! He's the local Master of Fox Hounds, and he's an old friend of my friends, too. How funny that we should both know Dabney Turberville!"

Helen felt that she and Guy Grenville were no longer strangers now that they had found so pleasant a mutual acquaintance. She forgot that she had come to the library to listen to Longfellow, and began to talk about Hunter's Green, about Veronique and Welby and Ben and Candace. Guy listened with so much interest that the next day she was encouraged to talk to him about herself. Guy contrived to draw her out without asking her any curious questions. In no time at all she had told him all about Alfredo.

She saw that he was touched by her confidence, but at the same time he did not respond in a tragic way. On the contrary, he spoke rather whimsically.

"Are all American girls engaged, or pining to be engaged, before they go abroad?"

"Why no, of course not! What makes you ask such a question?"

"Well, the grand tour seems to be regarded as a panacea for unhappy affairs of the heart. Unfortunately, when England comes first on the sightseeing list, we get the small end of the horn. The bereft maiden is still in a sighing stage upon arrival. After all, she always takes a five-day boat nowadays, so that doesn't give her

much leeway for recovery. By the time she gets to Italy, she's more receptive to the idea of consolation. So then she marries an Italian count who's an awful rotter, a thousand times worse than the suitor her family separated her from in the first place."

"I shan't do anything like that," Helen said soberly. "I'd much rather marry an Englishman than an Italian."

"You cheer me no end."

"That is, if I didn't happen to want to marry a Mexican," Helen added hastily. "Have you ever been to Mexico, Guy?"

"Oh rather! One of my uncles was British Minister there. It's a ripping country."

"Tell me about it."

They were sitting in one of the pavilions by the lake when this conversation took place, having been again caught in a rainstorm. It was not a very serious one this time, so they did not run back to the house for shelter or stay by the library fire for warmth. They continued to sit in the pavilion for a long time, while Guy told enthralling tales about Mexico. Then when the shower had passed, they went rowing on the little lake, and Helen gathered some water lilies. This free, friendly body of water, nestling on the edge of a forest, was not in the least like the still, sheltered pool in the garden at Hunter's Green, and there was nothing about the fresh English water lilies to remind her of the scented magnolia blossoms of her own South. It was the very lack of resemblance that comforted Helen. If any had existed, she would have found the reminder too poignant.

They rowed about for so long in the gloaming, that they were late getting back to the house. Helen had to dress for dinner very hastily, and showed it, when she came into the drawing-room, where everyone else was already assembled. When they went upstairs to bed that night, Isabel came into Helen's room, and spoke to her reprovingly.

"You may do almost anything else you like in an English house, Helen. But you mustn't be late to dinner, or come to it looking as if you'd been put together with a basting thread."

"I know, I'm very sorry, Isabel. I won't do it again."

"Well, after all, you won't have but one more chance. We'll be going up to London day after tomorrow."

"Do we have to really?"

"What a strange child you are, Helen! Of course we have to. We were only invited for a week-end, and we've been here over a week already."

"Yes. But Lady Grenville and Guy both urged us to stay on. And today Guy told me he'd be only too pleased if we'd do so indefinitely. 'Stop,' he called it."

"But we're on our way to London for the season! I went to no end of trouble to get your name on the Court list."

"Yes. It was awfully kind of you. I suppose we do have to go. But I like it so much here. I don't know whether I'll like London as well, or not."

"Well, how would you like to come back here after you've been to London?"

"Instead of going to France, you mean?"

"Oh, you could come to France later on. I'm sure your red-headed friend, Zoe Wing, would be terribly disappointed if you didn't go to stay with her. I think she's depending on you for all sorts of valuable contacts. But I might go over first and get my clothes started. Do just as you like. It's a suggestion, that's all."

It was a suggestion that Helen turned over in her mind with great willingness. In fact, she went so far as to speak of it to Guy, when they met in the pavilion the next afternoon. It was not raining that day, and she had no real reason for going there herself, still less for expecting to find him. But she felt impelled to wander out past the gardens just the same, and she was not in the least surprised when she saw Guy strolling along beside the lake, smoking a pipe and wearing the well-worn tweeds which were so becoming to him.

"Did you really mean what you said? About wishing I could stay longer at Star Hundred?"

"Rather! Are you going to do it?"

"Isabel says we must go up to London tomorrow. She's taken all sorts of pains to see that I got invited to Buckingham Palace, and the Royal Enclosure at Ascot and so on——"

"Isabel Windsor's a very charming lady," Guy said rather drily. "But when it comes to doing anything painful, she leaves that to someone else. There was nothing painful about this process——Senators' wives and daughters have been embellishing the London scene in large numbers for years," he went on. "Did Isabel intimate that she was responsible, through blood and tears, for the presentation of all of them? Personally I thought they were very welcome, anyway, and that the American Ambassador in London had something to do with the technicalities of their official reception—with a little hint from the President of the United States or the Secretary of State once in a while. You could've been presented easily enough without Isabel, Helen."

"Really?"

"Rather! It was a friend of mine from your Embassy who gave me the tip that you were on the *Leviathan* and his mention of Isabel was more or less incidental. That she was with you, or something of that sort."

"But you said the well-known Secret Service——"

"Oh, even a Britisher must have a little joke now and again! But don't worry about any of that now. Go ahead and enjoy your-

self. You'll have a ripping time. Only don't let Isabel browbeat you into feeling under obligations to her. Personally I think she's under obligations to you. It isn't often she'd be able to find such a delightful travelling companion."

"She said last night that if you and Lady Grenville were *really* serious in saying you liked having me here perhaps I could come back."

"Well, you could, of course. Would she come with you?"

"She said she might go on to France, ahead of me, to start buying her clothes. But, of course, nothing's settled."

"No, of course nothing's settled."

Something in his tone puzzled her a little. Hesitatingly, she asked him a question.

"Guy—— You were so wonderfully understanding about Alfredo and all—— I can't help asking you—— Don't tell me if you'd rather not——"

"Whether I'd ever been in love? Oh, rather! With an American girl, too. But she was worse than engaged. She was actually married, going around the world on her honeymoon. I met her first in Hawaii, where we were stopping at the same house, and afterwards in Singapore, where she was delayed by her husband's illness. I saw a great deal of her first and last. But I might as well not have existed, for all she cared. She worshipped the ground her husband walked on."

"Was he worth it?"

"Certainly not. No man is worth it. And this particular one spent a large part of his time playing the fool."

"Do you ever hear from her?"

"No. She began to guess how I felt, so she went away. You know Singapore's sometimes called 'The Halfway House of the World.' She said that when you reached a halfway house of any kind you couldn't stop still. You had to go either forward or back. She was right, too. I've always admired her no end for the stand she took."

"Was this a long time ago?"

"About five years."

"And you've never cared for anyone else?"

"Why, Pauline Pry! I'm ashamed of you! Is there no limit to your curiosity? Isn't one confession a day enough for you?"

Again there was nothing that hinted of mockery in his bantering tone. But Helen was confused. The colour that came so easily into her cheeks flooded them now.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded. Only I couldn't help hoping—you are so nice and everything—that someday you might have met another girl—well, that you thought you might like pretty much, too."

"If I tell you a secret, will you promise to keep it?"

‘Yes.’

“Well—I have met another girl I like very much.”

“Oh——”

“Only I’m not going to say anything about it at present.”

“But, Guy, why don’t you? It might save so much trouble. If Alfredo had only asked me to marry him in the first place, instead of dragging in all his family——”

“Alfredo did what he thought was the right thing. We call it ‘playing cricket’ in England. I don’t know what they call it in Mexico. But whatever they call it, he did it. You wouldn’t expect me to let a mere Mexican get ahead of an Englishman, would you, when it came to playing cricket?”

“Alfredo isn’t a ‘mere’ Mexican. He’s——”

“There, there, I know. Look here, it’s getting a little on the late side again. We’d better go up to the house, or Isabel may start in with some more scolding.”

But she did not. She was in a most melting mood. The last evening at Star Hundred was a very pleasant one, and Isabel, looking her loveliest, was the main centre of attraction. Some extra guests came in for dinner, and everything was very gay and festive. There were several Scots in the company, who were tall and young and graceful, and who were wearing the tartans of their respective clans. Some of them were in kilts and scarlet coats, and some were in long plaid trousers and dark velvet jackets, worn with white frills. Helen had never thought of any man as being “beautiful” before, but now she did. The young Scots were beautiful to look at. They danced beautifully, too, and she had a wonderful time with them. One of them eventually suggested that when she came back to Star Hundred she might take a side trip to Scotland with Lady Grenville and Guy, and look in at his place. She said that would be very nice, and that she hoped she could. But secretly she knew she would be satisfied just to stay at Star Hundred. Because, though the Scots were beautiful, she still liked Guy best.

When Helen reached her room it was long after midnight. She found that Emily had already packed everything except the last evening dress and the slippers that went with it. Helen was in such a glow of pleasure that she permitted Emily to help her undress for the first time. Then she lay down under the chintz canopy and relived all the events of her visit, with gladness, before she went peacefully to sleep. The next thing she knew, Emily was standing at her bedside with the tea-tray again, and the little copper kettle was steaming away in the washbasin. It was time to get up and go to London.

CHAPTER XI

ZOE WING sat on the terrace of Giles Arnold's Quai d'Orleans apartment, smoking cigarettes and looking down on the fussy little boats that crowded the Seine and, by way of variety, up towards the towers of Notre Dame etched against the pale summer sky. In her mood of slight perturbation she found the two sights equally soul-satisfying.

It was not often that Giles was late for an appointment, and this troubled her a little. Usually he was already watching for her when she crossed the cobble-stoned courtyard beyond the cave-like little cubbyhole where the concierge lived, and ran down the beautiful stairway, leading to the inner entrance, in order to meet her. The decrepit little lift did not "march" for progress downwards, and sometimes it did not "march" for progress upwards either, though it was supposed to. On the occasions when it was completely quiescent, a card attached with a metal chain to the cage confining it announced this fact, and Zoe walked all the way to the top floor, with Giles' hand under her elbow, propelling her gently. She did not mind the climb. She was naturally so agile and active that she was never out of breath, and she enjoyed the bantering way in which Giles always talked to her as they went along. He said it was only fair that she should suffer the same hardships as he did, since it was she who insisted in the first place that he ought to take the apartment, waiving aside all his doubts regarding the decrepit lift.

It was true that she had influenced his choice of a habitation very considerably. Captain Mason, whom he was replacing as Naval Attaché, had told him that the best way to find a flat was through the Benedict Bureau, which was run by the very capable American for whose mother-in-law eggs à la Benedict had been named, and who was especially resourceful when it came to a question of apartments, servants and cars, though there was actually no end to the different ways in which she could be useful. So Giles had sought out Mrs. Benedict, stating his approximate needs, and she had immediately furnished him with a list; and Giles, on his way back to the elegant Hôtel Crillon, where he was temporarily installed, had looked in at the humbler Hôtel Oxford, where Zoe was staying, and suggested that she should go house-hunting with him.

"I'm sure you could give me all kinds of helpful hints," he urged. "Besides, you might happen on something you liked yourself. There's no sense in staying at a hotel indefinitely, if you're going to make Paris your centre, while you're Zephyring in this

direction and that. You ought to dig yourself into some sort of a little hole of your own."

As a matter of fact, he did not have to do much urging, for Zoe had put on her hat and powdered her nose while he was still talking. There was nothing on earth she liked better than ranging around in Giles' company, and she knew that in the course of the house-hunting she would penetrate to countless picturesque parts of Paris which had hitherto escaped even her alert eye. So, once started, she insisted on going to every one of the places on Mrs. Benedict's list. But secretly, she had decided from the instant that they began to investigate the possibilities of the Ile de la Cité that Giles should take the apartment they found on the Quai d'Orléans. It was beautiful in itself, with noble proportions, tile floors, and exquisite woodwork; and it was beautifully equipped with very old French and Italian furniture and very new American plumbing and heating. But, after all, its terrace was its outstanding feature, for the view was most beautiful of all.

As she sat on the terrace now, looking at the Seine and the spires shining in the pearly light, Zoe thought of the day she and Giles had first stood there, in early January, when the same scene was mantled with snow, and she had insisted that it couldn't be real, that she was sure she was only looking at a glorified Christmas card. She had been so happy and so excited then, that she had not believed the joy of it all and the thrill of it all could last. Later the feeling that these were not, after all, unreal or ephemeral, had seemed increasingly well founded. And though doubts had eventually begun to assail her again, she could still look back on everything that had happened with a glow around her heart.

"You really think I ought to take this one, Zoe?"

"I'm damn sure of it."

"I thought you were going to be a good girl and stop swearing."

"I am a good girl. You ought not to mind a few little damns and a bit of hell now and then. Especially when I've eliminated so many bitches."

"You haven't eliminated them all. I don't mind a few little damns in their proper place and coming from the right source, and a bit of hell now and then is all to the good. But bitches, verbal or otherwise, haven't any place whatsoever in a discreet Naval Attaché's correct establishment. Especially an establishment as close to heaven as this is."

"Then you will take it?"

"Do you like it better than the one on the Rue Fabert, facing the Esplanade des Invalides?"

"A damn—I mean a whole lot better. What's an esplanade compared to a cathedral?"

"And better than the one on the Rue des Saints Pères with the charming garden in the rear?"

"A charming garden that you can't use! Tacked on to an apartment with bars across the drawing-room windows so that you won't step out of them on to the grass? Better than that? Like hell I do."

"There you go again, Zoe. After all, the owners on the other side of the *rez-de-chaussée* like to keep the garden for themselves. But I believe you're right. I believe this is where I'll land in the end."

Zoe was very pleased when the question of Giles' apartment was finally settled, and settled as she thought it should be. But she went on searching for one of her own. He had convinced her that she should have "diggings," too.

"Now that we've tracked down something large and lovely for you, we ought to be able to track down something cheap and cute for me."

"Yes. But get it tiny enough so that the thought of its overhead won't prey on your mind while we're off touring Spain and Portugal."

The plan of seeing Spain and Portugal together was the outgrowth of Zoe's first European venture in her *Zephyr*. Among her fellow-travellers on the *Conti di Savoia*, she had found a Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Baker of Oakland, California, especially congenial. They were young, enthusiastic, intelligent, and bent on wringing every possible ounce of enjoyment out of their first trip to Europe. Without being aggressive or importunate they had made Zoe understand that it would mean a great deal to them if she would accept them as paying passengers from Naples to Paris. She had gladly extended the invitation which she knew beforehand would be eagerly accepted, and, as an afterthought, she had asked Giles Arnold if he would care to make up a fourth in the group. He had, at the time, some leeway for leave of absence, as he had taken no time off since his China duty, and his answer was equally prompt and equally hearty. He had found Zoe such good company on board ship that he regarded the opportunity of prolonging their period of informal companionship as too good to be missed. The trip which followed was successful from every point of view. Giles' official contacts opened many delightful doors for all of them along the way, and greatly expedited the interview with Mussolini and the audience with the Pope which Zoe wished to secure. On the other hand, the appreciation and consideration which the others showed him in their turn was very heartening to him. Before they reached the Riviera he had made a suggestion on his own initiative.

"Look here, Zoe. As soon as I've got my bearings in Paris I have to go South again. You know I'm accredited to Spain and Portugal as well as France. I have to pay my duty calls in Madrid and Lisbon and make a tour of the Spanish maritime cities. I'll be going officially then, of course; I'll have to travel in my own car. I must buy a new one as soon as I get to Paris. But why shouldn't you and the Bakers tag along behind in the *Zephyr*?"

"No fooling, Giles, would you really like it if we did?"

"No fooling, Zoe. I shouldn't ask you unless I would."

It was because she felt so certain of this that Zoe had not hesitated to say yes. But meantime, after all the delights of Naples and Rome and Florence and Genoa and the Riviera, there had been those first unforgettable weeks in Paris——

It was emptied of officialdom when they first reached there, for everyone was still out of town on the long Christmas holiday. Giles had time to accompany Zoe while she did her first sightseeing and her first shopping, and to take her, in the evenings, to dine and dance at the Café de Paris and Maxim's. She wanted to see everything that was listed in the guide book she had bought before she met Giles on the boat, and she wanted to buy clothes. It amused Giles to see how seriously she took both museums and markets, but he kept his amusement to himself; there was a touching quality in her thirst for knowledge and culture; she was so eager to learn and to develop that it almost hurt. He had noticed that, light as she travelled, there were books tucked into all the corners of her bags. She read omnivorously; and translated what she read into terms of beauty. Finally he asked her when and where she had learned to do this.

"It was on the farm in Texas where I got my first job, when I was about ten years old. We had some kin there, a good deal better off than we were, and they offered to take me in during the summer time for my keep, if I would make myself useful. One of the ways I made myself useful was by churning and I always read while I did it. I memorized the Sermon on the Mount by reading it aloud over and over again. I learned to fit the rhythm of the Bible to the rhythm of the churning."

"You read the Bible aloud while you were churning when you were ten years old!"

"Yes, all of it. The dull Numbers and Leviticus and all the facts-of-life stuff throughout the Old Testament. I didn't get much out of that part—it more or less went over my head. But I didn't know how to skip, and I reckon it was just as well. I read quantities of Shakespeare, too, and memorized that. Before I stopped going to the farm I read all the books there were in the house. One of my cousins, who was much older than I was, had collected a pretty good little library. He was 'fixing' to be a preacher, and bought books, a few at a time, with all the money he earned himself. Later he died of pneumonia and left the books to me. I took them back to our cabin in Kentucky when I went home in the fall and read them in the winters, too, after that."

"But how could you read so much while you were churning?"

"Oh, it took me at least an hour a day to churn! My aunt used to come out of the kitchen and scold me severely. She'd tell me I hadn't lifted the dasher for five minutes, and say that all I did was

to read. Then I'd churn for dear life, splashing the milk and butter in every direction. I was pleased when some of it got on my hands. I'd heard somewhere that it made them white, so as the clabber and cream began to turn to buttermilk and butter I used to pause and rub the mixture into my skin. I must have been a vain little devil even then. I am still—— We've talked enough about churning now, Giles. Let's go out and buy clothes!"

After Giles had heard the story about the churning, he felt the same way towards Zoe's shopping that he did towards her sightseeing. She bought frugally, thoughtfully and with excellent results. He was able to tell her, in all sincerity, that the one evening gown, the one cocktail dress, and the one tailor-made which she purchased were all "just right." He wanted, with an intensity of which he would have believed himself incapable, to buy her the little soft fur jacket which she coveted, but which she denied herself, after three separate visits to the little shop on the rue St. Honoré where she had first seen it in the window. The patron was willing to bargain, but not to the extent that would bring it within Zoe's budget. She made rigid rules for herself and kept within them.

Giles' feeling about the little fur jacket was inspired by the gratitude which Zoe had revealed for other offerings and which had been very heart-warming to him. He was used to women who accepted little luxuries as a matter of course. Zoe took nothing for granted. She was delighted when he bought her a small bunch of flowers from a pushcart or a shabby little second-hand book from an open stall, and when he gave her two small bottles of good perfume at Christmas-time she was surprised and overwhelmed. She had never owned any expensive scent before, no one had given her such a present; she had been buying 4711 for herself since she could afford it, just the last year or two. Good gloves, good shoes, fine handkerchiefs, even silk stockings had all come into the same category until very recently, and when she did achieve them it was with her own hard-earned money. She had never expected things to be otherwise. Bob Morton was the first man she had known well who had any margin at all in the matter of spending money, and Bob had bought her candy and magazines, equally gaudy in character, when he gave her presents. She had discouraged such gestures, partly because she was determined to remain beholden to Bob and partly because his gifts were so uninspired. He did not have the taste and imagination about such things that Giles had, quite irrespective of the money.

Zoe knew that Giles wanted to give her the fur jacket, and she had been terribly afraid that he would offer to do it, or something else which would mar the even, pleasant tenor of their companionship. She did not want to become beholden to Giles either, past the point where the offerings he made and the opportunities he gave, though tremendous for her, were trivial to him. But the fear passed

with the passing weeks. She got along very well without the fur jacket, though she found she needed her new clothes as soon as she secured them, for people began to drift back to town soon after the first of January; presently the season was in full swing, and Zoe had more invitations than she knew what to do with. The *Examiner* had provided her with a letter to its regular Paris correspondent, James Hickson, and through him and his wife she quickly met other journalists, and later several prominent expatriated American novelists, with whom she secured interviews, and who liked her well enough to suggest that the acquaintance begun on a professional basis should continue on a personal one. Many of these writers, like the representatives of the big oil companies and the airplane manufacturers, were included in the larger parties given by members of the Diplomatic Corps, and Zoe found the circle in which she moved growing larger every week.

"If people had only been decent to me like this when I first hit Washington," she confided to Giles, "I wouldn't have started off scratching and biting with every line I wrote. Believe it or not, I was nice when I was a little girl. That vocabulary of mine you object to so much might have been more ladylike, too. It makes you feel different towards an ambassadress when she asks you in for a cup of tea and treats you like a human being than it does when she tells the butler to slam the door in your face, and looks at you as if you were some peculiarly obnoxious kind of vermin, when she does have the bad luck to run into you. Maybe things will take a turn for the better, as far as the 'lady journalist' is concerned, in our own great democracy some day. Meantime, if your cronies continue to stroke my fur the right way, not to speak of feeding me cream flavoured with fish, my stories will lose all their pep. Then I'll lose my job, and you'll have a starving orphan kitty on your doorstep."

Giles laughed and promised to take the starving orphan kitty in out of the cold if this happened. Meanwhile, he said, his mounting concern was not that she was a burden, but that he was seeing less and less of her. Captain Mason, the retiring Naval Attaché, had followed the pleasant prevailing custom of giving his successor in office a cocktail party, to which all the attachés connected with the multitudinous embassies and legations in Paris were invited, together with numerous other officials and a sprinkling of resident society, both French and foreign, besides. Giles had put Zoe's name at the head of the personal list which Captain Mason had asked him to submit, and she had made a hit at the party. After that Giles was apt to find that unless he asked her fairly far ahead she was "dated" already when he invited her to go out with him. This was especially true when it came to the big charity balls, for Zoe was a good dancer, and it did not take the young men about town long to discover this. She was snapped up by his own assistant

attaché, Lieutenant-Commander Henderson, for the Bal de la Victoire at the Cercle Militaire and the Bal de St. Cyrienne at the old Hôtel Continental, where the Empress Eugénie always stayed; but after that Giles was not caught napping. He took her himself to the Bal du Génie Maritime at the Navy Department, and a week later to the still more gorgeous Gala Maritime at the Opera House.

The stories which Zoe dashed off in the wee small hours to catch the five-day boats, and took down to the station, in the grey dawn, to slip into the postbox at the end of the track where the boat-train was drawn up, were far from lacking in pep, though they did lack her erstwhile malice; instead they reflected the exuberance of her mood and gave, vicariously, to her readers the thrill she was experiencing herself. She wrote a vivid description of the magnificent State suite in the Navy Department, of the "Salon Bleu" where the élite awaited the arrival of the Secretary of the Navy, and the progress of the old-fashioned march which preceded the ball, with this functionary at the head of it. Still more glowing was her account of the illumination in the Opera House, of the glittering tiers of loges among which she herself was installed, and of the buoyant throng which crowded the "false floor" laid over the orchestra pit. One of Zoe's fans wrote in to the *Examiner* saying that she herself could fairly see the shining staircase and the blazing chandelier, that she knew just how funny the stage show was, that she felt as if she had fainted on the overcrowded dance-floor, but that she had been revived by the champagne served on the little tables placed on the landings and around the galleries! "Can't we have more than two letters a week from Zoe Wing?" the lady ended by asking. "When she was tearing through Tennessee we had three! And Paris is ever so much more thrilling than the Great Smoky Mountains!" Mr. Ruthven, the Managing Editor, read this letter reflectively several times, and eventually sent it on to Mr. Kahn, the owner of the *Examiner*, with an office memorandum. The following day Zoe received a cable instructing her to send over four stories each week, one of them suitable for a Sunday feature, until she received further instructions, and to wire them instead of mailing them whenever she thought their importance warranted this. The message ended with the statement that she had been given another raise. The next time Giles saw her she was wearing the little fur jacket.

By this time she was comfortably quartered in her own "diggings," which were indeed "cute and cheap." A tiny house on the rue du Cherche Midi, offered by the ubiquitous Mrs. Benedict, had greatly intrigued her, for it was picturesque and unique; but she had again resisted temptation and had taken, instead, a tiny furnished apartment on the rue Madame. There was no lift, not even a decrepit one, in the house where it was located, no central heat-

ing, and no plumbing beyond a small inside "cabinet"; but it was quaint and cosy, with coal grates and soft draperies and period furniture, and it looked out over a series of red-tiled roof-tops, which made a jagged line against a friendly sky.

Zoe loved the roof-tops. She never wearied of looking out at them, and she talked about them often to Giles, translating these, too, into terms of beauty.

"I never would have thought roof-tops could be so lovely, Giles. I always knew that mountains were magnificent. I can remember misty mountains, rising all around our cabin in Kentucky, before I can remember anything else. And afterwards, in Texas, gardenias growing out of the grass. There was a little plot in front of my aunt's house, with trees and flowers on one side of the porch steps and gardenias on the other, springing up just as freely as dandelions do in some other places."

"Was that the porch where you did your churning?"

"No, that was the back porch. There was a rain barrel there at the juncture of the porch roof and the hired man's room, and beyond a clean, bare backyard, and beyond that a grove of paradise trees. Those were beautiful, too. So was the churn itself, when you come down to it. I believe it was the sort that antique dealers call a stone churn, but it was more like rough pottery, a beige colour. Something the same colour as those walls, Giles, under the red roofs. I wish I were a poet instead of a reporter, I'd write a poem about the tiled roofs of Paris."

"Perhaps you will some day. Anyhow, you're making a poem out of them, with your feeling about them, whether you write one or not."

That was the way she thought about it herself, she reflected as she sat on the terrace waiting for Giles now. She had made a poem out of the little perch on the rue Madame; but she had been practical about it, too. There were two bedrooms in the apartment, so Zoe had rented one to the Bakers, and Léonie, her *bonne à tout faire*, who was *très courageuse pour le travail*, gave them their coffee in the morning and other meals when they required these; but for the most part they ate at various small *cafés* and *bistros* in the neighbourhood, which they adored and where they were adored in return. They were very fond of Zoe and very content to be quartered with her, but they were careful not to intrude in any way on her expanding scheme of life.

This scheme took in more and more events, more and more people, all the time. Zoe went to a dinner at the American Students and Artists Club, to a gala movie for Sister Mary Reeves' poor, to a musical soirée at the Italian Embassy, to Maggie Rouff's opening at nine-thirty in the evening. She met Teddy Trelawney, the American multi-millionaire, who had married the beautiful Marie Conception of the Follies, and lived in quiet happiness with her on the

Ile de la Cité, not far from Giles. She met the American aristocrat who had married an Alsatian nobleman and called herself "Princess Wilhelm the XLIV," and the American eccentric who had paid a pseudo-genealogist a thousand dollars for tracing her descent from the Barons of Runnymede, and kept the certificate which was supposed to prove this under glass on the front hall table. She met the German princeling who later married the crown princess of a neighbouring country, and the great French engineer who had worked with de Lesseps and would not admit that his countryman's experiment at Panama had been a tragic failure, and a Polish soldier of fortune who had lost a leg at Verdun and had just married for the fourth time. She met various haughty and handsome kept ladies who moved in good society and were inclined to be critical of young married women who indulged in light flirtations; and she met several sprightly young sculptors who regarded her with appreciation and told her they would be pleased to have her pose for them at any time and in any kind of costume.

Giles was extremely irritated the first time he overheard one of these proposals, which, incidentally, was by no means the first time that one had been made, nor was it couched quite so crudely as some of the others had been. The feeling was intense and surprising to him, as it had been in the case of the fur jacket, and quite as clear to Zoe as that had been. But he did not speak of it until they were on their way home after the Maggie Rouff opening, to which Giles had escorted Zoe. She had bought a new dress for the occasion, to do honour to Giles' tails and topper and to the general smartness of the amusing crowd; she looked as radiant as she felt and acted. But Giles' face had again taken on the sombre look which had been characteristic of it in Washington, but which had lightened so perceptibly in the succeeding months.

"Look here," he said suddenly, "haven't you had enough of all this, for the present? The season will be over directly anyway as soon as Lent begins, and that's a week from Wednesday. Paris will be dead as a doornail after that. Why shouldn't we start for Spain?"

"No reason at all that I know of. The Bakers said they'd be glad to go any time. And the Zephyr's had a complete overhauling. It's rearing to be on the way."

"I wish we were all going together, the way we did the last time."

"Well, it would be fun. But you said yourself, when we first talked it over, that this trip would have to be different, that before you were on leave of absence and that this time you'd be going in your official capacity."

"Oh, I know. It's true, of course. But I wish it weren't."

He pulled himself together quickly. He had been dangerously close to a proposal himself, not a proposal like the one from the daring young sculptor, but a proposal of honourable marriage. For years he had taken it for granted that Isabel was the one woman in

his life, and that since she was unattainable, he would never marry. Now for the first time he began to ask himself whether that idea was fundamentally sound. After all he was not bound to Isabel in any way. She had given him to understand, vaguely and delicately, that "if anything should ever happen" to Stephen, she would marry him, after a proper period of discreet mourning. But now that more than ten years had passed since she first said this, Giles was beginning to feel the chances that something might happen to Stephen were too remote to bank on. Candace Hunter had been right in surmising that, in the beginning, he had not suggested divorce to Isabel. He had been cut to the quick by her desertion, and at first he had resolutely tried to put her out of his mind and to devote himself entirely to his career. But he had found that advancement was easy for him and that forgetfulness was not. The first time he was sent to the West coast, he asked Isabel to go there as his wife, to begin all over again with him; but she had declined, on the grounds of religion. He had admired her for this, as he admired her for her later refusal to become his mistress; but recently little creeping doubts had begun to assail him. He had heard Isabel say, hundreds of times, that she did not care for California; did her reluctance to leave the feverish Washington scene, of which she was so integral a part, possibly—just possibly—have something to do with her proclaimed principles? Or was the fact that his own inherited fortune, though substantial, was still only a drop in the bucket beside Stephen Windsor's have anything to do with them, by any chance?

He had begun to ask himself these questions before he met Zoe, so he could not lay them, directly, at her door. But the fact remained that since he met her his questing mind had taken him further than ever. He had never before been brought into close contact with a girl of exactly her type: self-made, intelligent, independent, courageous and candid. He did not willingly make comparisons between her and Isabel; but the knowledge that Zoe would never have thrown over a man to whom she had professed herself deeply attached, because she met another man who was richer, kept forcing itself into the foreground of his consciousness. Involuntarily, he began to go further than this, to picture what life would be like if she were constantly at his side, instead of being seen in snatches. The snatches had been satisfactory enough, at first, but they had long ceased to content him. He wished that she were not merely going to "tag along" on the trip to Spain, but that she were to share his own official status. He had overheard two or three jovial references to her as his "lady friend," and several times lately someone had said to him, "Of course you'll bring your red-headed girl along." There had been no implied disparagement of Zoe in these remarks, for her own straightforwardness disarmed gossip; on the other hand, they had been made lightly and teasingly. He

would have preferred a respectful reference to his fiancée, or better still to his wife. "Naturally Madame Arnold will be with you." Yes, that was it. The vision of Zoe as she would look and act and talk, seated at his fireside, presiding at his table, accompanying him as he made his visits, became more and more inescapable. Inevitably, it was followed by visions of increasingly intimate character—

"Would you care to come up for a nightcap? I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes."

Zoe had broken in abruptly on his reverie. It was not often she suggested he should come in when he took her home from a party, and he accepted her invitation with pleased astonishment. Her little salon looked extremely cosy as he entered it. The damask curtains were drawn across the windows, the coal fire in the grate was warm and glowing, and the chairs were grouped companionably. Zoe would not let him help fix their drinks. She said he looked tired and cold, that he must take things easy and get warm; she would have everything ready in just a jiffy. Again an unwelcome comparison crept into his mind. He could not remember that Isabel had ever wanted to wait on him, that Isabel had ever considered his comfort and well-being before her own—

Zoe came back with the drinks. During her brief absence she had taken off the new evening-gown and had put on a house-coat. It was suitable and becoming, but it was not filmy or intimate in character; Giles knew that the change had been made merely from motives of economy and comfort, for Zoe took good care of her hard-earned clothes and enjoyed her hard-earned ease. Nevertheless, he derived a peculiar satisfaction from seeing her, at a shared fireside, so informally dressed. It was thus that he was beginning to visualize her continually.

"Glad you're aboard," she said, raising her glass. It was his own favourite greeting, and it pleased him that she had borrowed it. He sat sipping his drink contentedly, looking at the fire, and scarcely bothering to wonder what Zoe might have on her mind. Then she told him.

"I am, you know. Glad to have you aboard, I mean. But has it occurred to you that if you're aboard too often we might have heavy weather?"

"No. Of course not. What an absurd idea! Why?"

"Well, you almost proposed to me tonight. It wasn't the first time either."

"You're a very discerning young woman. But why should that mean heavy weather?"

"Because we're just good companions. We couldn't ever be anything else."

"Why not, Zoe?"

"I thought there was a very special reason as far as you were con-

cerned. In fact, I've been reliably informed, several times, that there was. If I hadn't been, I'd have told you there was a special reason as far as I was concerned anyway."

"Do you mean you're in love with someone else?"

"More or less."

"That's no answer at all. Are you engaged?"

"Not exactly. But I've said that perhaps I would be, some day, under certain conditions."

"But, good God, there's nothing binding about such an arrangement as that!"

"It all depends on the way you look at it, doesn't it? I imagine the man in question considers that he's bound. It's a poor rule that doesn't work both ways."

Giles was silent, wishing for the hundredth time that he could avoid mental comparisons.

"I've let him kiss me, twice," Zoe continued. "What's more, I kissed him, both times, too. I don't go in for casual kissing, as perhaps you've discovered. There was something quite conclusive about this. In fact, the second time I think I probably would have been formally engaged, in a minute, if you hadn't come and pounded on my cabin door just then."

"You don't mean Bob Morton!"

"Yes, I do. And I'd rather you didn't speak about him in that tone of voice, Giles, if you don't mind—— Would you care for another drink?"

She took his empty glass and refilled it, capably, chatting on, cheerfully and pleasantly, while she did so.

"I hope you don't think I sounded swell-headed, Giles, saying I knew you almost proposed to me. I didn't mean it that way. I'm awfully proud that you should want to. I think you're one of the grandest persons I've ever known, and you've given me the grandest time I've ever had in my life. I'm very fond of you. If I hadn't been I never would have played around with you all this time. I hate girls who grab everything they can get out of a man, and then turn him down cold when he asks for something in return. I'd never do that knowingly. But you see I was so sure about this major interest of yours that it never occurred to me you'd want anything I could give you. I wouldn't have cheated for the world. It's meant a lot to me just to know you. It means a lot more to have you for my friend. But if you think you can't keep on being my friend without wanting to be my lover too, I don't believe I'd better go to Spain with you."

"I'm afraid I can't help wanting to be your lover. That is, your husband. I've grown to love you very much, and every word you say to me makes me love you more. You're so straight and so square. And so brave and so lovely. It would make me very happy to have you for my wife."

"I've told you, Giles, how it is."

"Yes. You've been very fair. Fair to Bob Morton and to me, too. It's like you, Zoe, to be so fair. It makes me love you more than ever. But let's be friends anyway. Let's go to Spain, just as we planned. I promise I won't propose to you again."

He rose, managing a smile.

"Not that I did this time," he said rather ruefully. "You took good care of that. You always master a situation, don't you, Zoe? Anyway, I'll leave this one in your hands."

It was on this note and in this mood that they had gone to Spain, and the trip had been successful from every point of view. Again the Bakers had been buoyant travelling companions, and again Giles had swiftly unlocked guarded doors for Zoe to enter. They started a little later than Giles had originally suggested, for shortly after the conversation following the Maggie Rouff opening he had been advised that he was expected to attend the inauguration of the Ibero-American Exposition at Seville in his official capacity; but this had meant an expansion instead of a curtailment of their time and their opportunities. Seville was in a state of high festival, crowded with dignitaries, pulsating with events; and the unexpected Andalusian sojourn had offered an excuse to see Ronda, Granada and Cordova, in addition to the maritime cities. From Barcelona, where another beautiful exhibition was in progress, it seemed natural to "slip over" to the Balearic Isles; from Lisbon it was equally natural to go to Cintra, Alcobaca and Batalha; and Lisbon, like Seville, was *en gala*, for a United States cruiser on its way to the exhibition was in port, and they went in the Admiral's gay little "gig" to a *thé-dansant* aboard her. They saw the Alhambra by the lustrous light of a full moon, and the Mallorcan landscape through a rosy mist of almond trees in bloom. They learned to love the Spanish sun as it shone on warm hillsides and tawny battlements, and the Spanish shade as it gathered in dim cathedrals and quiet *barrios*. Zoe wrote her stories in one blue-tiled, sweet-scented patio after another, while Giles sat beside her, silently smoking, and listening to the peaceful dripping of the fountain and the poignant sweetness of a nightingale's song. Afterwards they sat talking together until the late dinner hour. It was an idyllic interlude.

On one of these quiet evenings, which brought to both of them more joy and fulfilment than anyone they met or anything they saw, Giles asked Zoe about her name. It had puzzled him for a long time, but he had never found a propitious occasion to speak to her about it. Now in a still garden hedged in with yews and cypresses, and perfumed by orange-blossoms and roses, it seemed fitting and appropriate to speak of anything that was intimate and beautiful. He knew instinctively that Zoe's mood would harmonize

with his, and that she would talk, as he loved to hear her, of her background and her childhood, but more freely and fully perhaps than ever before.

"Zoe," he said, "I wish you'd tell me something."

"More about the churn?"

"No, something different this time. About your name. How did your parents happen to give you a Greek name?"

"They didn't. They called me Gwen the first few years, but fortunately they never bothered to have me baptized; it was Arthur who saw to that, the cousin I told you about who left me his library, the one who wanted to be a preacher. I think he knew he was going to die when he did it, but he felt I'd carry on a long time. So he named me 'Life'."

"Oh—so you knew what it meant?"

"Yes. I've always known. Arthur taught me Greek when I was a little girl, Giles. Latin, too, and lots of other things. School and college were very easy for me. I couldn't have worked my way through them so fast if they hadn't been."

"Are your father and mother dead now, too? You've never told me actually, though you refer to yourself jokingly as an orphan."

"Yes, they're dead, too. But all my brothers and sisters except three who died when they were little are still living. They're coming along nicely. They've had a good start."

"Good God, you're not helping to educate them, too, are you?"

"Of course. Those that still need it. Two of them are through school now, though. One sister is older than I am; she's married, very well married, too. Her husband's a prosperous contractor in Louisville. She's able to help give the youngsters a lift herself. And one brother's just passed his Bar exams. He'll be able to help, too, pretty soon. That only leaves four—one in college, one in normal school and two in high school. And they're all resourceful. They don't sponge on me, Giles. Don't get that idea. I wouldn't help them if they did. I hate a sponger, even if it's a relative. That is, I would. But the Wings aren't built that way. They're self-reliant."

"Sometimes I wish you weren't quite so self-reliant, Zoe."

"No, you don't. The orange-blossoms have affected your alleged mind, that's all. Come on. It's time to take my masterpiece to the post office."

Reluctantly he consented to leave the garden and walk through the high-walled streets. But the tranquillity of the patio continued to enfold him. All night long he seemed to hear the fountain murmuring, in unison with the song of the nightingales, "Zoe means life—Zoe means life—Zoe means life."

Even Zoe admitted that France seemed cold and gloomy on their return to it, and the whirl of the little season tedious and artificial after their happy holiday. But presently the chestnut

trees along the avenues burst into bloom, and the Bois became a glade of feathery green. When Giles stole an evening to take Zoe out to dinner now it was to Pré Catalan or Armenonville, or, if they had time, to the Restaurant de l'Yvette in the Vallée de la Chevreuse or to the Providence at Jouy. There were week-ends in the country, too, at private châteaux or at famous inns, where their hosts proved more sophisticated as companions than the Bakers had been, but where the atmosphere they created was still light-hearted, still friendly and unquestioning. Soon Normandy was covered with the "fragrant snow of spring"; its apple blossoms were as beautiful and as mystical as the rosy almond bloom of Mallorca; and in the evenings there were wood fires lighted on historic hearthstones, which gave out a warm and ruddy glow far into the night.

One Saturday Giles and Zoe started off with Marie Conception and her millionaire, who seldom left their retreat on the Ile de la Cité, but who finally consented to make a "tourette of Touraine" for Zoe's benefit. They had two days that were cloudless, literally as well as figuratively. They lunched at the Ver Louisant among the ruins of Chinon and wandered among these afterwards; they dined at the Auberge du Mail at Amboise, and watched the quiet Loire flow by from the terrace while they lingered at their little tin table, set under a plane tree, until it was bedtime. But as they swung homeward by Chambord a heavy, unseasonable rain began to fall. They had intended only to take tea at the neighbouring Hôtellerie de St. Michel; but they were soaked to the skin by the time they had covered the great treeless space between the vast deserted castle, so cold and echoing in its emptiness, and the warm little inn where a cheerful welcome awaited them. Without a dissenting voice, they agreed to take their suitcases out of the car once more, get into dry clothes, dine in front of the fire, and spend the night there, before pushing on to Paris the first thing in the morning.

Dinner was very good. There was a *consommé* of vegetables, subtly blended with cream, and *filet* of *sole meunière*, and *poulet maison*, with green salad and *pâté de foie gras* and a jam omelet. There was clear, dry Chablis with the fish, and a bottle of full-bodied, ruby-coloured Pommard with the chicken, sparkling Vouvray with the sweet, and some fiery *fine* after the coffee. By the time they had finished, Conception confessed that her eyes were closing; her head had been drooping on her husband's shoulder for a long time before that. Finally, he lifted her in his arms, which were already closed around her, and carried her upstairs as easily and tenderly as if she had been a baby. The *garçon* came in, cleared away the last remnants of the feast, put another log on the fire, and murmuring "*Bon nuit, monsieur, 'dame,*" discreetly withdrew. Zoe, who was rather drowsy herself, sat look-

ing lazily into the flames, much too comfortable to stir or speak. But at last, galvanized into unwilling alertness by the consciousness that Giles was looking fixedly at her, she glanced up and met an unmistakable expression in his eyes.

"Look here," she said, trying to speak sternly. "You're not going to slide safely by Andalusian moonlight and Balearic blossoms and all the rest of it, and then let a little wine and warmth get you down, are you?"

"It isn't just the wine and the warmth. It's sharing them with you. It's thinking what it would be like to do it always. Those and all the other homely, intimate, vital things that go with them. Anyone can go a little mad, for a little while, in a moonlit garden or in a fragrant forest. But that sort of feeling doesn't necessarily last. This does, Zoe."

The simplicity and sincerity with which he spoke were disarming. She found she could not frame a quick silencing retort. He saw his advantage and pressed it.

"What would you do, Zoe, if you found you'd fallen in love yourself? Not 'more or less,' the way you said you were with Morton? But head over heels, the way I wish you were with me?"

"I'd tell Bob what had happened. I couldn't do anything else. It wouldn't be honest."

"Then why don't you?"

"I haven't anything to tell him—yet."

"Probably that's the first lie you ever told in your life. Anyway, it's the first one you've ever told me. But you're lying now, Zoe."

She leapt up, but he was too quick for her. He was on his feet first, grasping for her wrists, holding them hard, and speaking to her in a harsh voice.

"Look here," he said. "You better get over the idea right now that I'm going to let a couple of kisses you've given another man stand in the way of a lifetime of happiness. Those kisses weren't conclusive. You only think they were because you've no standard of comparison. You haven't kissed enough men to get one. That's the trouble with a girl of your kind. You look like a vixen, but your looks are only skin-deep. Inside you're a puritan. And you act hot-headed enough once in a while, but all the time that cool brain of yours is functioning like a steel machine under your red hair. If you'd dive off the deep end just once, without thinking, you'd be better off and so would I."

"Let me go, Giles. I'm not diving off the deep end for you or any other man."

"I'm not going to let you go until you've kissed me. I dare you to say you don't want me after that."

"I shan't kiss you if you keep me here all night. I can't stop you from kissing me, if you're bound to. But you'd be a lot wiser to wait. It's a damn sight better to be off with the old love before

you're on with the new. And that doesn't apply just to Bob and me. It applies to you and Isabel Windsor."

"Isabel Windsor's kept me waiting fifteen years. That's long enough for any man to wait for any woman."

"Well, I don't believe she means to keep you waiting much longer. I think you can have her whenever you want her, almost any time now."

"What in hell are you talking about?"

"No nice man swears, Giles. Or so you say—— Do you mean to tell me the 'Belle Dame sans Merci' hasn't written you she's on her way over here?"

"Zoe, you're joking."

"That isn't my idea of a joke. She's giving Helen a wonderful trip to Europe, so that poor little sweetness can recover from her thwarted love affair with the attractive but ineligible Mexican suitor. At least that's the public version of it. Personally I think it's all hokey, that the story's just a smokescreen. In fact, I know damn well it is. Helen's coming to stay with me, as soon as she's been presented at Court. I invited them both, when I heard from Helen about this trip—she writes me fairly often. But Isabel declined in the sweetest note you ever read in your life. She said she wouldn't dream of putting me to so much trouble, that she'd stay at the Meurice, the way she always did. With the rest of the royalty. She didn't add that, but I will. There was really quite a pathetic touch to her letter. She's giving the faithful Sarah a vacation, leaving her behind at the cottage in Kent which is Sarah's ancestral home. She's going to try to do without a personal maid for the first time in her life. Probably she'll find it so much trouble to get dressed that she'll stay in bed most of the time. In one of those beautiful, still rooms at the Meurice that have two sets of doors and look out on a secluded courtyard when the green satin curtains aren't drawn across the big windows."

Giles had dropped Zoe's wrists. He stood looking at her with an expression of horror on his face.

"If she hasn't told you all this it must be because she's meant to give you a pleasant surprise. I haven't said anything about it because I thought that sooner or later you'd say something to me. I've never known just what sort of a body it was that was buried between you and Isabel. I don't care especially. I thought I'd just let things take their natural course. I thought that if, when she got here, you found you wanted her after all, there wouldn't be anything for me to tell Bob anyway. On the other hand, if you found you didn't—— Well, I thought that maybe, after Helen had finished her visit, I'd shut up shop on the rue Madame and go back to Washington for a while. I might have done it anyway. I don't want to stay over here so long that I'll lose the pulse of things at home. I'm not going Zephyring for ever. I'm aiming at something

bigger and better. In writing, I mean. But that's beyond the point. I thought when I got home I might size up the situation, as far as Bob's concerned. For all I know he may have decided himself that those kisses weren't conclusive. It wouldn't be unlike him to fall for Veronique, now that it's too late to do him any good. Veronique may have been an unwise virgin, and all that, but you can bet your bottom dollar she won't make a cuckold out of a helpless husband."

Zoe spoke scornfully; Giles, who had tried so hard to avoid comparisons, knew that she was making them without mercy.

"So all you had to do was to bide your time. I thought maybe you'd have sense enough to do it. I hoped you would. But since you haven't, I reckon we're in for that spell of heavy weather that I warned you about a while back. I'm sorry, Giles. I'm awfully sorry things have turned out this way. But we'd better make the best of them, hadn't we? That is, you don't want to say farewell for ever tonight, do you? Or anything else dramatic? I think myself we'd better try to set the clock back. Not that we can, of course. But I think we'd better try."

They had both tried, with determination. But the spontaneity that had beatified the spring had gone; a sense of strain marred their companionship. Giles, inwardly cursing himself for every sort of a fool, spoke and acted with obvious restraint. Zoe kept telling herself—and him—that their quarrel had cleared the air, that she was more at ease than she had been before, and that he should be too. Desiring to be generous, she went more than halfway in her efforts to behave naturally and nonchalantly. It had never been her habit to go to Giles' apartment unless she knew that he expected other visitors at about the same time. Now she took to dropping in casually, at odd hours, as if to prove her confidence in his discretion and her sympathy with his predicament. Despite his forced reserve, he always showed how glad he was to see her when she came. But several weeks went by before he took the initiative by actually asking her to come. Then he sent her a *pneumatique*.

"DEAR ZOE"—he wrote—"Could you drop in this evening between six and seven? I think I can get in myself by that time. And I'd like to find you, waiting for me, when I get home. Yours, always, GILES."

Zoe looked at her watch. It was after eight. The pearly light which had flooded the city and the Seine when she first went out on the terrace still transfigured it. But its quality was changing. The long gloaming of midsummer had set in. Night was still more than an hour distant. But it was no longer day.

She was not impatient. She could sit, indefinitely, looking out at this scene which had taken such a hold upon her. But she began to

be troubled. It was so unlike Giles to be late. He had the precision of his profession in regard to time, and besides, he was always so eager to see her. Whatever caused the delay, she was sure that it boded no good. But when at last she heard his step behind her and turned to see his face, she knew it was even worse than she had feared.

He came up to her and took both her hands. Then he raised them to his lips and kissed them. He had never done anything of the kind before. He did not follow continental customs, but kept, consistently, to American ways, which he always contrived to imbue with grace and dignity. Zoe knew the fact he was kissing her hands now had some deep inner meaning for him. She waited for him to tell her what it was.

"Zoe, Isabel is here. At the Meurice. She came in on the Golden Arrow last evening. She's left Helen behind, in England, with the Grenvilles. Helen isn't coming over until next week, when you expected her. She's left Sarah behind too, in Kent, the way you said she would. And she's been in bed all day. She said she wasn't equal to getting up. You were right about that, too. I never saw her in bed before. But now I've been sitting beside her bed for hours, talking to her."

Again Zoe waited for him to go on.

"She says she's learned to love me at last. She says she's ready to do anything I want her to."

"Well, what do you want her to do?"

"Nothing. I tried to tell her so. And she wouldn't believe me. She couldn't understand why I wouldn't stay with her tonight. She thought I was being 'considerate' as she called it. She talked about going off to some 'sweet little inn' with me. I couldn't tell her outright that nothing would induce me to do that, because I'd been to so many of them with you, in a different way. I couldn't tell her there was no question of chivalry involved, that I simply didn't want her."

His voice had grown harder with every word he spoke. Zoe answered in a tone that was also without softness.

"Does she really want *you*? Or does she want something you can give her?"

"I don't know what you mean, Zoe."

"She's estranged from her husband, isn't she? He hasn't given her anything for a long time except money and position and security. I think she wants to keep the money and the position, but I think she's ready to gamble with the security. She's tired of living like a widow when she isn't one. She wants the thrill and the risk of being loved."

"The risk?"

"There'd be a risk, wouldn't there? Unless you were very careful."

"I don't know what you mean, Zoe," Giles said a second time. "I'd never compromise her, of course."

"No. You'd never compromise her. I know that and she knows it, too. But she might bind you to her so that you'd never get away, so that you'd never be a free man again. I think that's what she wants to do, what she intends to do. Don't let her do it, Giles!"

Zoe went on with a rush, her pent-up emotion unleashed at last. "Go back and tell Isabel the truth," she said fiercely. "Tell her you don't love her any more. Tell her you do love someone else. Tell her who it is, if you have to. Tell her you want a home with a helpmate in it, not a hole-in-the-corner intrigue with a rag and a bone and a hank of hair! Tell her when you get a child it's going to have your own name, not some other man's! Tell her all that before it's too late! If you haven't got the guts to do it, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live!"

"And suppose I do tell her that, Zoe—what then?"

"Then somehow—I suppose—we'll find a way to face the heavy weather together."

CHAPTER XII

GILES left Zoe fired with the determination to break away from his office early the next day and make a clean breast of the situation to Isabel, at all costs. But his purpose was thwarted at every turn.

This was not for any lack of an early start. It was only eight-thirty in the morning when he left his apartment on the Ile de la Cité for his office on the rue de Chaillot, and his chauffeur, Vladimir, who had been a captain of Don Cossacks, and who had the true Russian's sensitivity to moods, quickly divined the malaise of his employer. Giles found it exceedingly difficult to concentrate on a form of approach to Isabel, but as they drove up the Quai to the Place de la Concorde, he mapped out his office work in such a way that the interview might be delayed as short a time as possible. He was blessed with an energetic and capable staff, and although it was "pouch day," and he would be obliged to have his weekly reports signed and delivered to the mail room by four in the afternoon, he had already studied the rough drafts and the task still before him was merely a matter of glancing over the smooth copies to be sure that they were in order before affixing his signature to them. Both the international and the local political situations were reasonably quiet at the moment, and he had every reason to be hopeful that he might be clear of routine work in time to join Isabel before lunch.

His disillusionment was speedy and shocking. He had not even seated himself at his desk when a dispatch was thrust into his hands.

"ALUSNA, PARIS"—it read——

"Necessary change itinerary midshipmen's Practice Squadron substituting visits Cherbourg and Lisbon for those previously scheduled Marseille and Palma. Advise by dispatch if changes acceptable to French Spanish authorities."

A glance at his calendar showed Giles that no time was to be lost in obtaining this information if the proper arrangements for the cruise were to be made. It was clear some important reason must have dictated the change, and that the Department desired immediate action. Leaving the week's smooth reports untouched in his basket, Giles summoned his staff. His assistant, Lieutenant-Commander Henderson, was set to drafting the necessary dispatch to the United States Embassy in Madrid, and also to telephoning a friend in the Spanish Embassy in Paris for a helping hand in expediting a reply from the Foreign Office. Giles himself telephoned his friend, Henri de Rogier, the Liaison Officer for Naval Attachés, in the French Deuxième Bureau, and de Rogier promised immedi-

ate action by the Ministry with the local authorities at Cherbourg as well as with the Foreign Office. Meanwhile the Chief Clerk, spurred on by Giles, occupied himself with the current mail, including letters to United States Consuls, questions regarding military reduced rail fares, and the multitude of other details incident to any visit of three large Naval vessels to a foreign port.

As he was concluding his telephone conversation with de Rogier, Giles glanced up to see the Ambassador's personal secretary, J. Rockingham Davidge, entering his door. He had never cared especially for this conscientious but somewhat pompous functionary, and his greeting was curt to say the least.

"Well, Davidge, what's on your mind?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Captain Arnold, but the Ambassador would like to see you in his office at once. He has just received a dispatch concerning a proposed agenda for the coming Naval Conference; and he would like to confer with you about this."

Giles rose reluctantly. He did not mind operating under pressure, when this was indicated, but he never felt he was doing his best when he attempted to tackle one job before another was finished. This time, however, he had no choice. There was nothing to do but leave his staff to worry about the midshipmen's Practice Squadron and hasten to the Ambassador's office, disregarding the message just brought to him by his secretary that a Mrs. Windsor had called him from the Hotel Meurice and desired to have him call her back at once.

It was more than two hours later when he emerged from the Ambassador's office, having attempted to explain, in the interval, the meaning of category A and B cruisers, capital ships, unlimited classes, gun calibres and global tonnage quotas to a man who, though intelligent and interested, had not the remotest idea of the terminology involved, much less of the fundamental principles at stake. He himself had begun to feel groggy before he had been engaged in this futile effort for fifteen minutes; but since the Ambassador expected to be named as a delegate to the forthcoming Conference and had instinctively turned to his Aide for enlightenment, Giles had mechanically gone on repeating the explanations which would have been difficult for anyone but an expert to follow. Now he felt he had reached the limit of his endurance; unless he could have a stiff drink and a breath of fresh air, he was sure he would soon begin to jabber like an idiot.

Unfortunately, neither form of refreshment was available at the moment. His secretary was awaiting him with the alert air of one who is prepared to spring. He pretended not to see her, as he rushed by to his own room, but she planted herself firmly in his path.

"Captain Arnold! I'm sorry to detain you, if you're in a hurry, but Mrs. Windsor has called you again twice. She says it's very

urgent that she should reach you. And the British Naval Attaché, Captain Sir Kingsley Beauchamp-Moore, has called you several times. I told him you were in conference with the Ambassador, but he said he had something most important to discuss with you. He said that since he couldn't reach you by wire, he would try to talk with you in person. I couldn't dissuade him. I think he'll be here almost any minute. I thought you ought to know in case you'd like me to get a call through to Mrs. Windsor before he arrives."

"I haven't got time to talk to Mrs. Windsor. I've got to find out what's happened to those misplaced midshipmen. Get Captain de Rogier again for me immediately."

He continued to stand, restively, by the switchboard while she attempted to put through the call; but before she had completed it, he heard himself jovially hailed from the rear.

"Cheerio, old man! What's the news with you? You must have been getting enough to last from now till doomsday, judging from the time you were inaccessible. Come on over to Florian's with me for tiffin. I've had a communication from the Admiralty that I want to talk over with you. We've both got to eat anyhow, so that's as good a way as any to handle it, what?"

Under ordinary circumstances Giles would have been delighted to see Sir Kingsley, of whom he was sincerely fond; like most Englishmen of real distinction, Beauchamp-Moore was affable, cultured and entirely devoid of "side," and his cordiality was almost impossible to withstand. To fall in with his plan seemed to offer the line of least resistance, even though his invitation was inopportune; so telling his secretary not to bother about the call after all, Giles followed his visitor out of the office. Sir Kingsley was very full of his subject and much excited over it. He had received a communication, he said, concerning a proposal made by "a certain" nation to construct a class of new and very fast vessels, larger and more powerful than the category A cruisers from the capital ship quota of tonnage. Had Giles heard anything about it and what did he think of it? Giles had not heard anything about it, but the matter was indeed one of vital interest, and the luncheon hour passed rapidly as the two men discussed various naval types and their tactical use. It was shop talk of the most exciting kind, and the British attaché's keenness was a bracing antidote to the American Ambassador's blind bewilderment. For the first time that day Giles succeeded in wholly forgetting Isabel and the imminence of the difficulties which her presence in Paris indicated.

It was after three when he returned to his office. By this time the smooth reports, awaiting his signature, and the release dispatches were buried under six inches of mail that had arrived in the course of the morning. His fingers itched to clear out his "incoming box" and be on his way; and still there was no escape in sight. Three formally attired Frenchmen were sitting in his

ante-room, and though they had the sleek, satisfied look which steals over Gallic countenances after a full meal washed down with sound wine, this aspect was far from somnolent; their eyes were peeled and their ears cocked for his return. One was round and rubicund, one was bearded and beaming, and one was lean and hawklike, but all had the unmistakable stamp of a set purpose. Bowing from the waist and shaking hands with hearty effusion, they proclaimed with one accord that Lieutenant-Commander Henderson had indeed received them most courteously, but their business was urgent and confidential; they had preferred to await the leisure of Captain Arnold in order to discuss it with him personally and privately.

The word "leisure" came close to producing an explosion, but by a supreme effort at self-restraint Giles controlled himself, invited his visitors into his office, and asked them what he could do for them. Two of the gentlemen proved to be Messieurs Archambeaud and Delattre, who were ordnance engineers and inventors, and the third their lawyer, Monsieur Gizard. It developed that they had designed a revolving type of mount for machine-guns or small calibre cannon by means of which all vexatious problems of fire control against aeroplanes would be resolved. They felt convinced the United States would be interested in the development of their mount, and this was the occasion of their call.

The subject was introduced with characteristic Gallic elaboration, and his callers had hardly reached the point of their purpose when Giles, surreptitiously glancing at the clock, saw that its hands were already pointing at three-forty-five. Excusing himself momentarily to his guests, who betrayed their astonishment that anything should be permitted to interfere with so portentous an interview, he summoned his Chief Clerk, who seemed to have some difficulty in smothering a smile, and together they dug frantically into the pile of papers in the "incoming box" to unearth the unsigned reports. Ten minutes later these were signed and on their way and Giles was able to turn again to his visitors, who had occupied the interval with a whispered conference which had enabled them to warm to their subject. M. Archambeaud began to talk again with a vehemence which seemed proof against both time and exhaustion, but when he finally wearied in well-doing, M. Delattre took up the excited refrain. Soon all available table and desk space was covered with blue-prints, and Giles, who had long believed that nothing could exceed the determination of an inventor, was appalled to find that it could not compare with the determination of two inventors. Nor could anyone, he decided, be so hard to dissuade as a scientist who had a theoretical idea which was demonstrably correct. To such a man time, space, weight and convenience were negligible factors which could not possibly affect the practicability of his own brain-child. As soon as Giles had

grasped the essentials of the proposed plan he realized that the weight and unhandiness of the mount rendered it valueless; but it was a different matter to explain this tactfully to Messieurs Archambeaud, Delattre and Gizard; and even when this was done the difficulty of dismissing them with graciousness combined with firmness still remained to be faced. When this had finally been accomplished and Giles himself prepared for flight before some new problem could arrest him, he saw to his horror that the office clock now read six-thirty.

He burst out of the door almost at a run, only to collide with a man who was attempting to enter at the same pace. When they pulled themselves together with mutual apologies, Giles saw that his impetuous visitor was one Fred Humphrey, who had been skipper of Giles' flagship the *Edsall*, in Asiatic waters; they had covered the China coast from Chingwangtao to Jolo together and had been the best of buddies; but they had not seen each other since Giles returned to Washington and characteristically had seldom corresponded. Now, however, "Hump" was bursting with news which he could not wait another minute to impart to Giles. He had taken advantage of accumulated leave and with his family was returning to the United States via Europe. They had taken the *President Monroe* of the Dollar Line at Shanghai and had had the grandest trip ever, stopping at half a dozen ports along the way and making shore excursions which "Hump" was determined to describe in detail. At Marseilles they had left the *Monroe* and come north by train in order to take a faster boat from Le Havre, and spend the intervening time in Paris, where they had arrived that morning. They had been trying all day to reach Giles by telephone, but something seemed to have prevented them from getting him. Now he must join them for dinner. There was no use talking.

"Hump, I can't. There's nothing on earth I'd like better. But 'no can do.' I've an engagement tonight I can't break to save my hide. I'm going to Longchamps with a group of friends. They've taken a box. Look here, we're dining at the Château de Madrid first. You collect the missus and come along. Then we'll plan for something else. But I've got to go on the double-quick gallop now. My car's outside. Jump in and I'll drop you at your hotel on my way to my apartment."

Giles intended to call Isabel as soon as he got back to his own apartment and could speak to her quietly, without running the risk of being interrupted or overheard. But the telephone was already ringing when he crossed the courtyard, and by the time he reached it his mood was one of desperate exasperation.

"Oh, Giles, I've been trying to get you ever since early morning! What have you been doing and where have you been?"

"Everything. Everywhere. It's just been one of those days. I'm

very sorry, Isabel. But I'm free now, for the moment. What can I do for you?"

"Please come to see me right away. I'm wretched. I couldn't sleep after you left me last night. And I've had a dreadful day."

"If you're not well, don't you think you had better send for a doctor?"

"I didn't say I was *sick*. I said I was wretched."

"I'm sorry. I misunderstood you. If you're all right, then why don't you get up and come out to the Fête de Nuit at Longchamps this evening? I'd arranged to go with a group before I knew you were coming to Paris, and I've already asked a couple of friends who've also arrived here unexpectedly to join us. I'm sure we can collect an extra man. Those night races are a gorgeous sight—the turf course is beautiful, and the horses and riders look like toys moving around on it. Then, of course, there are all the mannequins and fancy ladies in evidence, wearing gorgeous furs and jewels and paradise feathers. I think it would amuse you to see it all. We were planning to have dinner at the Château de Madrid first. I'll call for you in about an hour, if that'll be all right."

"But, Giles, I've been to Longchamps dozens of times. You talk as if I'd never heard of it before. I'm not a Cook's tourist in Paris for the first time. I don't care at all about going again. I want to see you alone."

"If that's the case I'm afraid you'll have to wait until tomorrow. I want to see you alone, too. I'd hoped to do so today, but, as I said before, I was unavoidably prevented. I'd be glad to have you lunch with me here at my apartment, or I'll come to the Meurice, just as you prefer. But, as I said, this party for tonight was already made up before I knew you were coming. I'll call you again in the morning, Isabel, and you can tell me then what you've decided you'd rather do. I've got to go now. I've barely time to dress."

After he had hung up he realized that he had done so almost abruptly, and that his curtness had been caused by the fear that if he gave her a chance Isabel might change her mind and tell him she was coming after all. But it did not occur to him that she would call him back to say this. His irritation mounted when Étienne, his capable *valet de chambre*, pounded on the bathroom door while he was still under the shower to say that Madame Vinzorre would be pleased to accompany *Monsieur le commandant* to Longchamps, and that she would expect him to call for her at quarter before eight.

"Oh, my God—— Étienne, can you hear me?"

"*Oui, monsieur le commandant.*"

"Call Mademoiselle Wing and ask her if she'd mind meeting me here. Tell her I've been delayed and haven't time to get to the rue Madame. And ask her if she knows of some gentleman who'd be

free to join us this evening. If she does, tell her to ask him to meet us here, too, or at the Château de Madrid, whichever would be more convenient for him. Do you understand?"

"Parfaitement, monsieur le commandant."

When Giles, duly showered, shaved and clad in fresh raiment, emerged from his bedroom, Zoe was already awaiting him on the terrace, in company with a personable young Frenchman. Whatever she might have thought of the situation she was outwardly unperturbed by it.

"You know Monsieur de Blonville, of course, Giles?" she said calmly. "It was his cousin's place, near Caen, that we went to a week ago Sunday with the de Hauterives. He'd just dropped in for an aperitif when your S O S came. He says he'd be delighted to dine with us and go on to the Fête de Nuit afterwards."

"It's very good of you, Monsieur de Blonville. An old friend of mine, Mrs. Windsor, has just arrived in Paris, about a week earlier than I expected her. She's alone and was rather at loose ends for the evening. I've told her we'd stop by for her at the Meurice."

"I have the Zephyr right outside, Giles. If you don't mind going in that, instead of your own car, then I won't have to change over when we get back."

There were, Giles could see, other obvious advantages to this arrangement. With Zoe at the wheel, Isabel would not be able to dictate the homeward route; this meant that he would not be left alone with her, since obviously she would not do anything so indiscreet as to suggest that he and she should leave Zoe and Monsieur de Blonville after having started out with them. He felt too exhausted to face a scene or go into explanations of any kind, and he breathed a sigh of relief, encouraged to hope that the evening might turn out better than he had feared at first. But his hopes were shortlived. From the moment that Isabel, a vision in heliotrope, took her place beside him on the back seat she monopolized him entirely. She acknowledged the presentation of René de Blonville charmingly but fleetingly, her attitude implying that she knew he was preoccupied with Zoe or desired the freedom to be; and she greeted Zoe with the careful condescension of those who never forget to be courteous in addressing their inferiors. As the Zephyr went speeding up the Champs Élysées, she asked Giles about the rest of the party.

"We're meeting at the Château. Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Trelawney——"

"You don't mean Teddy Trelawney of Cincinnati, do you? The young fool who lost his head over that famous danseuse at the Folies Bergères? I forget her name——"

"Her name is Marie Conception. He married her, Isabel. She's perfectly beautiful, and she's devoted to him. They're very happy together. They live very quietly and hardly go out at all. She does

the marketing herself, with a silk handkerchief tied around her head."

"Well, Giles, I must say—you're keeping rather bohemian company these days, aren't you?"

"Meaning just what?"

"Why, people like Teddy Trelawney and his girl and——" She glanced in the direction of the front seat but wisely left her sentence uncompleted. "The young Frenchman is very much *épris*, isn't he?" she said in a playful undertone.

"I don't know that he is specifically. He was asked at the last moment to look out for you. I'd invited Zoe myself this evening."

"Oh, Giles! You make me feel so terribly in the way."

Giles' jaw hardened into a straight line. He completely ignored the appeal.

"The Princess Wilhelm is coming, too," he went on. "I believe you knew her before. She says she remembers you pleasantly from 'better days in Berlin.' And an old Polish beau of hers. And the British Naval Attaché, Beauchamp-Moore, and his wife. They have a house-guest, a young girl, Daisy something. I don't know who's been asked for her. And the couple I didn't expect, the Humphreys. 'Hump' was my flag captain when I was in the Orient."

"I do remember the Princess. She's an awful frump, isn't she? I shouldn't think she could get a beau, but then you can never tell." Again her glance strayed towards Zoe, as if including her in the category which would find it difficult to achieve masculine attention. "I must say I'm more and more surprised at your companions tonight, Giles. Surely you don't have to ask people just because you knew them in China. I thought you'd be going with the Ambassador."

"No, he's with the President. He's taken Webster, the Military Attaché, as his aide."

"Of course! Fred Webster has so much *savoir faire*, hasn't he? I should think he would deal with any sort of situation smoothly and be a great asset here in Paris. By the way, I knew the President very well when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs. I'll leave a card at the Élysée tomorrow."

"Are you planning to stay in Paris some time, Isabel?"

"I haven't decided yet. I want to talk to you about my plans again. We can see each other alone tomorrow, can't we. I'd love to come to your apartment to lunch."

She had lowered her voice again, but Giles made no direct response. He leaned forward to say something inconsequential to René de Blonville, and after that he contrived to keep the conversation general. The fire of his determination had faded. He was very tired. He dreaded, increasingly, the prospect of seeing Isabel alone.

The evening was not outstandingly successful. Everyone was cor-

dial to Isabel and she was studiously charming in return. But none of Giles' friends gave her the feeling that her presence was an unexpected honour, for which they were overwhelmingly grateful. They called each other by Christian names, and even by nicknames, so that she had difficulty in disentangling their various unfamiliar identities. They talked about people she did not know and joked about things she did not understand. Afterwards they carefully explained who the people were and what the jokes meant, but the damage was done by that time; she was admittedly an outsider in a closely knit circle. It did not seem fair, either, that Marie Conception should be so flawlessly beautiful, and Zoe Wing so inescapably arresting. Isabel was not accustomed to seeing the glances of her male companions stray in other directions when she herself was present. But she saw this now.

She had a brief moment of triumph when the American Ambassador caught sight of her on his way to the Presidential box, and stopped to speak with her. But this triumph was short-lived. What was she doing at the Meurice, he wanted to know. She must move to the Embassy at once. He and his aunt, who was staying with him, would expect her the next day. He would send for her about twelve. He nodded agreeably to the rest of the group, said something to Zoe that they both seemed to think was very funny, and went off, as if the matter were settled. Isabel, inwardly raging, knew that it was. Unless she could contrive to detach Giles from the others before the evening was over it might be a week at least before she had a chance to see him alone again. Since she had no car of her own with her, the Ambassador would insist on sending her everywhere in his, and if she directed his chauffeur to take her alone to the apartment of his Naval Attaché, the news of this indiscretion would inevitably reach the Chief's ears, with results which might be disastrous to both Giles and herself; and with the constant flow of visitors in and out of the Embassy it was futile to hope that a *tête-à-tête* of any length could be staged in any one of its large and disadvantageously open salons. The Ambassador was expansively hospitable; he would never listen to the suggestion of a short visit; and at the end of a week Helen would be coming over from Star Hundred. Anything might happen or fail to happen——

"I'm so distressed," Isabel whispered to Captain Beauchamp. The seating had been carelessly arranged in the grandstand, and she was placed between him and the Polish adventurer; Giles was at the opposite end of the box. "Do you think you could attract Miss Wing's attention?" Isabel went on in a voice of sweet resignation. "I seem to be rather faint. The feeling keeps coming in waves, and it's getting worse and worse all the time. I do hate to be a bother to anybody. But I think I'll have to ask Miss Wing to take me home. I came in her car, you know."

"I say, I'm no end sorry. Let me speak to Connie. I expect Zoe

has to stay to the end, don't you know, on account of her story. She never runs the risk of missing a trick."

"Connie" proved to be Marie Conception, who was seated on Captain Beauchamp's other side. She rose with sympathetic alacrity.

"Oh, Madame Vinzorre, I am ver' sorree! Teddie and I veel take you home at vonce. No—but I inseest! The Meurice is directly on our vay. Ve vere veeshing to sleep away, but quietly, ourselves. And now you give us the excuse. *Allons!* You veel be bettair ven you are away from all these crowds, vere you can repose yourself."

"I'm sure she's on the telephone, calling me again at five-minute intervals. She'll be angrier than ever when she finds I'm not there to answer, because she'll begin to wonder where I did go and probably form a fairly correct idea," Giles said gloomily to Zoe, several hours later. She was pounding out her story, but she had told him that if he cared to hang around she would be glad to talk to him as soon as she had shot it into the mailbox at the end of Track 19 in the Gare St. Lazare, whence the boat train would be leaving for Cherbourg at 6 a.m. She thought she could have it done by three, as a matter of fact, if he'd only leave her alone. But after that she merely shook her head as a signal that she had heard him and smiled abstractedly when he spoke to her. Eventually, however, she shoved a smudgy piece of paper across the table towards him.

"Read that," she said tersely. "If you think it might help I'll mail it at the same time with my piece. You seem to have lost your nerve. I thought it was all settled that you were going to thrash things out, and here you are backing away from your lady-love, or your ex-lady-love, or whatever you want to call her, as if she were a rattlesnake ready to strike. That isn't a bad simile, at that."

"It's a very bad one. I can't have you talking about Isabel like that, Zoe."

"I can't help talking about her. She's on my mind. She doesn't show up so well, does she, when you take her out on the town? I could see that René was bored to death by her, and none of the others gave a damn about her one way or another, which griped her like hell. Now the Humphreys were different—they're real people. A mere restaurant isn't a worthy setting for her charms or a country squire an escort adequate to her demands. She requires a private palace and a prince to shine her brightest and best. Incidentally, why does she always wear those widowy colours like pearl-grey and pale violet when her husband's still alive? They so openly suggest receptivity to other male attention— Well, as I said last night, I think you'd better tell her brutally—"

"I haven't had a *chance* to tell her brutally. Not that I think I ought to be brutal, anyway, though I do mean to be candid. You're

very unfair to her, Zoe. And I've told you what kind of a day I've had——"

"Well, I'd have come out with it by now, candidly if not brutally, if I'd been in your place, even if I'd had to murder the Minister of Marine to stop him from taking up too much of my time. But since you haven't had the guts to do anything of that sort you might lamp that letter."

The letter was written with a soft pencil, such as Zoe used for correcting manuscript. The flimsy piece of typewriting paper which she had shoved towards him was covered with her scrawling script. Giles read it incredulously.

"DEAR BOB,

"I'm dashing this off at 3 a.m. to ask if you'd help me out of a tight spot. Or rather a friend of mine.

"A dame has just descended on Paris with dishonourable intentions towards him and it would smooth things out a lot if he could divert her by saying he was engaged to me. The engagement wouldn't be official, of course, but the news would leak out, because the dame would be as sore as hell, and she would tell everyone who would listen to her. I wouldn't want you to hear of it indirectly and misunderstand. What I said to you last summer still goes, that is if you want it to. I'm coming home pretty soon to talk it over with you. Meanwhile please cable me 'Go ahead' or 'All rights reserved,' according to the way you feel.

"Yours as ever,
"ZOE."

"P.S.—In case you're interested in knowing:

"I like the man who's in a tight spot very much, well enough to want to do him a good turn, if I can and you're willing. But he hasn't really taken your place as my high particular, as sweetness used to say. I'm expecting her here next week, as you may or may not have heard. She got side-tracked in Merrie England at a place called Star Hundred by one Guy Grenville. I don't know yet just what that means as far as our friend Alfredo is concerned."

Giles looked up, still holding the sheet of paper tightly in his hand.

"You mean that if Bob Morton cables 'Go ahead' you will be engaged to me?" he asked hoarsely.

"Read the letter again, big boy. I said not officially. But I will be as far as Isabel is concerned. She'll be caked up at the Embassy for a whole week, and that'll give you a much-needed breathing spell. I can see that you're definitely not equal to the knock-down and drag-out fight I recommended, though I still think that would have been much the best thing. My, but did she look grim when the good old Chief came along and gave her such a glad hand!

Well, I told you I wouldn't talk about her. But by the time her visit is over I'll have my cable, and maybe we can go and call on her together, in a state of newly affianced bliss. Oh, for the love of Mike, act your age, Giles! I'll begin to wish I'd drowned you along with all the other blind kittens I've disposed of more or less painlessly."

Zoe ripped another sheet out of her typewriter and reached for a Manila envelope which was already addressed. Into it she thrust her piece, without even stopping to read it over. Then she licked and stamped the envelope viciously.

"As long as you think the letter's O.K. there isn't anything to talk over," she announced. "Give it back and I'll stick it into another envelope. You can come down to the station with me, if you want to. After that I think we'd both better get some sleep. You in your little corner and I in mine."

Isabel's expression did not again betray her. Baffled and chagrined as she felt, she looked and acted the part of a gracious guest perfectly, from the time she stepped into the Ambassador's car, the day after the Fête de Nuit at Longchamps. Her tact and her charm won every heart from the Ambassador's, his aunt's, and his other guests' to those of his secretaries and his servants. But she wore herself out in well-doing. At the Fourth of July reception, given at the Embassy for all Americans in Paris, nothing could have exceeded her helpfulness and amiability; all the tourists were enchanted with her, and the unofficial residents had rarely enjoyed such a treat as she contrived to give them. When the turbulent and exacting occasion was over, however, she excused herself, with a pitiful little smile, in the midst of the Ambassador's expressions of appreciation.

"Dear Mr. Ambassador, I'm so glad you feel that way about it. But you're too kind. I didn't do anything important, really, I just filled in little gaps here and there. I'm the least bit tired now, though, and if you'll excuse me I think I'll go upstairs."

As she spoke she put out a slim, ringed hand and caught at the back of a Louis Quinze chair to steady herself. But apparently the precaution had been taken too late. The next instant she fell, still gracefully, to the floor. Giles, with the other members of the Embassy staff, had stayed on for a buffet supper after the reception. It was natural that he should spring to her side, and, once she was in his arms, that he should carry her upstairs to her room. She was almost unbelievably limp in his embrace, and after he had put her down on her bed, she lay very still, her long lashes fluttering slightly over her pale cheeks. At last she opened her eyes, slowly, only to close them again, and spoke in a faint voice.

"I'm terribly sorry to be such a nuisance. Don't bother to stay with me, Giles, if you'd rather not. I'm sure you must have some-

thing tremendously important to do. I shouldn't interfere with the fate of nations just because I've swooned like a silly Victorian female."

"You're not interfering with anything. Of course I'll stay with you until a doctor gets here. It bothers me to think I've had such a terribly full week that I've seemed to neglect you. But things do pile up this way every now and then. If only the Humphreys hadn't come on top of everything else—— Do you feel a little easier now?"

"No—no—no! I feel as if there were no bottom to the bed—— As if I were falling and falling and falling into an endless pit. Oh, Giles, please don't let me fall!"

"I won't. Don't be frightened, Isabel. I'm going to hold you tight until you feel better."

He slid his arm under her again to give her a sense of support. The complete laxness of her limbs, the pliant softness of her shoulders, were startling to him. It was inconceivable that such a fragile form should sheathe any sort of a firm foundation which would give self-reliance. It bespoke the delicacy which required constant care and constant cherishing in order to survive at all. He realized that it was not fair to judge a woman built like this by ordinary standards. She was too frail and too defenceless. Instinctively he drew her a little closer.

"There," he said, "there. You'll be better soon. It's been a warm day for Paris. And you've got over-tired, trying to give everyone else a good time. You shouldn't exert yourself. You must get a good rest. And a nice long rest. You'll see, that's what the doctor will say when he gets here."

It was, in effect, exactly what the doctor said. He could not find any organic disorder or functional disturbance which would account for the fainting fit; but he agreed that it had indeed been very warm, that official receptions were proverbially exhausting, and that Mrs. Windsor was evidently completely prostrated. He suggested that she should stay quietly in bed all the next day, and that the day after, if she felt able, she should go down to Deauville for a rest and change. He thought she would find the Hôtel de Normandie very comfortable and the sea air bracing and beneficial.

"But, of course, she shouldn't go alone. Is there some friend who would go with her?"

Helen had arrived from England two days earlier, and, under Zoe's zestful guidance, had begun an intensive sightseeing and social programme in Paris. They had both been at the Embassy reception earlier in the afternoon, but had gone on, with the Hicksons, the Trelawneys, and two unattached swains, to the Cercle Interalliée afterwards. Giles, who had lingered to hear the doctor's verdict, mentioned her availability.

"Oh, I wouldn't take Helen away for the world. She'd under-

stand, she's such a sweet little thing, but Zoe Wing would never forgive me for anything of the sort. And I'm sure she'd be terribly vengeful if she were roused. You know how that red-headed type is. No, I wouldn't consider sending for Sarah either. This is the first vacation she's had for years and she needed it. You have no idea what an exacting mistress I am. Don't look surprised, Giles. I know you think I'm gentle and kind, and I do try to be considerate. But I'm very demanding, really. I know all my own grave faults. I don't mind being alone in Deauville, Doctor, really I don't. One of the maids here will pack for me, and I'm sure the director of the Normandie will find just the right person to look after me there. If Captain Arnold could just take me down in his car——"

"Of course I will. You know I'd be glad to do anything I could to help."

It was very late when he left the Embassy, so late that though he also went on to the Cercle Interalliée, he found that Zoe and her party had already gone. She had left a note for him, however, saying that she would especially like to see him for a moment that evening in regard to a message she had received from the United States, and that she would wait up for him until two. It was actually a little after that by the time he reached the rue Madame. But looking up from the sombre narrow street he could see the lights burning brightly from her cheery windows. He mounted the stairs and rang the bell lightly twice. For some time this had been a signal they gave each other.

She opened the door for him promptly, giving him a matter-of-fact welcome. "Sweetness has gone to bed," she said. "She's put in a big day—two of them, as far as that goes—and she was just dropping in her tracks. Come on into the salon, but don't make any more noise than you can help. What kept you so late? We waited and waited for you. We had an idea we might go on somewhere else, to the Ambassadeurs for instance, when we left the Cercle. But we didn't want to run the risk of missing you."

"You know there was a buffet supper at the Embassy after the reception. And then Isabel had an attack of faintness. I couldn't leave until she began to feel better."

"You don't mean to say you fell for anything as trite as that?"

"It was really serious, Zoe. Isabel's a frail little thing; she always has been. A girl like you, wiry and rugged, can't understand how little endurance that sensitive high-strung sort of woman has."

"She's frail, all right, but not the way you think she is. So now that her devastating delicacy's been duly certified, what's the next step?"

"The doctor says she must have a complete rest, by the sea. She's going down to Deauville, day after tomorrow probably, to stay at the Normandie."

"Well, at least that isn't one of the places you and I have been

together, so you can avoid those mental comparisons that you told me, a week ago, would be so painful to you. You're driving her down, I suppose?"

"Yes. On Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning. But, of course, I'm coming right back. And she wouldn't hear of having Helen's holiday with you interrupted, or of sending for Sarah. She's been terribly unselfish about the whole thing. She says she's sure she can find a nurse or a maid in Deauville who'll do. It's pathetic to see her, Zoe. She's so little and tired and helpless. She's going to lie on the beach and sleep a great deal——"

"Giles, you told me, when we first got to Paris, that bitches didn't have any place in a correct Naval Attaché's establishment. I'd hate like hell to have you change your mind about that."

"Zoe, I'm willing to put up with a good deal from you. But I can't let you speak that way about Isabel."

"You don't need to put up with a damn thing from me. You don't need to see me again, ever, as long as you live. You're welcome to Isabel, and all her sweet helpless ways, as far as I'm concerned. I'm sorry I ever bothered to try to help you get rid of her. I thought you wanted to. It was my mistake, that's all. One of my worst."

"You haven't made a mistake, Zoe. I don't want Isabel. I do want you. I need you. More than anyone else in the world. But I can't be cruel to Isabel on that account. I loved her for a long time, and she grew to feel she could count on my love. I've got to let her down gently. If I don't, she'll never recover from the shock. And then I'd blame myself all my life."

"I'm afraid you've got to take your choice, Giles. I'm afraid you've got to tell Isabel, straight out, that no matter how many times she faints in your arms you'll just lay her down on her pillow and leave her, or else be bound to her forever, just as I warned you that you would be."

Zoe rose, as if indicating that there was nothing more to say on the subject and that it would be better if Giles went away. Then, almost as an afterthought, she picked up a folded strip of grey paper from the table.

"Considering the way you've lost your nerve," she said rather tonelessly, "I don't believe this cable will be much of a disappointment to you. I was afraid it might be. I've heard from Bob. He didn't answer according to either of the formulas I gave him. He says: 'ALL BURN'T BY YOUR LETTER. WRITING MYSELF. DON'T STAGE YOUR GIRL SCOUT ACT UNTIL YOU HEAR FROM ME.'"

Zoe refolded the paper, and laid it back on the table again. "Of course I'll have to," she said. "Wait for his letter, that is. So we're not going to be engaged at the moment, Giles. Not even unofficially engaged. You'll have a whole week, before Bob's letter gets here, to break things gently to Isabel, or to decide you don't want to break

anything to her. I shan't interfere with you. In fact, I'd rather not see you again, alone, if you don't mind—until we have something definite to say to each other. I don't see that we get anywhere at all by jumping on each other."

She missed him, during the next week, more than she was willing to admit; but she declined to compromise with the conditions she herself had made, even when Giles called her up the next morning, and told her that he had been doing a great deal of serious thinking, and that he thought it might be a good plan if she and Helen would come down to Deauville for the week-end, too. They had other plans already, she said firmly. They were going in the opposite direction, to Beauvais and Amiens; they might even make a triangular trip of it, and come back by Rheims. She had thought, for a long time, that there was a story about the director of the American Hospital for Children there, and she never liked to pass up a chance to see that grand old boy, the Cardinal—No, they weren't going with anyone else. Just she and Helen in the Zephyr. And they weren't planning to make any visits; they were going to stay at hotels. Of course, they might run into friends along the way, but if they did, it would be accidental.

She and Helen did not return from their jaunt until the following Tuesday morning, and she spent the next day piecing together the notes she had taken while she was gone and trying not to keep her ear cocked for a telephone which did not ring. She had no trouble at all in getting two good articles out of the material she had gathered, and when she had finished these, it was time to start for Versailles. Monsieur de Blonville, who had so obligingly filled in at the dinner following Isabel's inopportune arrival, had proved to be the hospitable possessor of a flat overlooking the gardens, and he had invited the same group with whom he had dined to join him there to see the "*Grandes Eaux*." It was only logical, he said, that since they had made the Fête de Nuit at Long-champs so pleasant for him, he should do his poor best to make the Fête de Nuit at Versailles pleasant for them. He could not promise anything as spectacular as the mannequins in their paradise feathers. But, after all, there was dancing on a decorated float, and fireworks, and the illumination of the fountains. And though he was desolated that the charming Madame Vinzorre had been obliged to retire to Deauville for repose, he was sure, since Mademoiselle Ving said so, that Mademoiselle Mortonne would prove a delightful substitute.

There was no disappointment about the evening, as far as de Blonville was concerned. He was enchanted with Helen, and showed it, with Gallic candour tempered by Gallic finesse. And Zoe was annoyed with herself because she failed, for the first time since she had been in France, to enter zestfully into the spirit of an occasion

which should have been delightful for her as a woman besides being advantageous to her as a journalist. But she kept watching the door leading to the entresol instead of the window overlooking the park, and the cold salmon and the still colder champagne, the *salade russe* and *glace aux marrons* of the excellent buffet were all tasteless to her. Giles was not there when she and Helen arrived at Monsieur de Blonville's flat, though the Trelawneys and the Princess with her Pole were installed already. He did not come either with the Humphreys or the Beauchamp-Moores, as she next tried to tell herself that he would. In fact, more than an hour went by, and still he did not put in an appearance. It was nearly ten when she finally heard his familiar step on the stairs, and when he came into the pleasant little drawing-room, his expression was so bitter and his manner so formal that his presence cast an instant gloom over his surroundings. His host, after one or two tactful efforts to draw him out, abandoned his attempts, with an almost visible shrug. Helen, greeting him artlessly and gaily, shrank away from his rebuff, wondering how she could have offended him, and hoping that no one had heard the curt way in which he spoke to her. But Zoe had done so. Her own heart sank still lower at the sight of Helen's distress. She avoided looking at Giles until she saw that the precaution was superfluous. He made no move to turn towards her; he gave no sign of cordial camaraderie. In a way, it was almost as if they had never seen each other before; in another it was different, and it was much worse. Something beautiful which bound them together had been blighted. Zoe knew that if the blight were not broken, swiftly and spontaneously, the tie would be severed forever.

Wednesday was even harder to get through. The Trelawneys had invited Zoe and Helen to spend the day at their little cottage, on the river near Moret, which they had thoroughly renovated as far as "confort moderne" was concerned, but which still retained all the aspects and atmosphere of rural charm. Giles and Arthur Kennard, one of the young Vice-Consuls on whom Helen had made an immediately favourable impression, were to have gone with them; but early in the morning Arthur had telephoned to say that Giles was "all tied up again" with Messieurs Archambeaud, Delattre and Gizard, and that there was no one else, either at the Consulate or at the Embassy, who could get a day off. Could Zoe think of someone herself, or should he call Connie? Zoe could think of a dozen persons, she said shortly, which was quite true; and Henrik Andersen, the young Danish chargé d'affaires whom she selected as the most desirable aspirant among them, and who was delighted to go, proved both ornamental and agreeable. But he was slightly stiff; he did not fit into the lovely landscape at Moret with the same ease and conviviality which Giles would have shown on such an occasion. He kept his well-cut coat on when they

went rowing in the skiff; he did not pet the baby ponies or joke with Ted and Connie about the "family" they were raising; he did not loiter on the lush, green sward sloping down towards the river, or fling himself down in the sunshine; he showed no skill in roasting geese over the pit for the picnic luncheon. Zoe knew that all the others shared her own disappointment over Giles' absence. The knowledge was salt rubbed in a wound which was growing more sore every minute.

The Princess was giving a garden supper of about a hundred that evening, and the same group that had spent the day at Moret went on together to this, after briefly parting to dress. It was all very gala. There was a *chanteuse* from the Poisson d'Or as the entertainer, and there was general dancing before the midnight buffet. But though Giles, who again turned up belatedly, asked Helen to dance once, he did not go near Zoe. She knew that by this time his avoidance of her must have been noticed, for he had never been far from her side for thirty consecutive minutes at any such gathering before. She caught curious glances resting on her more than once; and Teddy, with the unconscious cruelty characteristic of privileged acquaintances, asked her teasingly what was eating her boy friend. "If you mean that sourpuss, Giles Arnold," she heard herself saying surprisingly, as if it were someone else who had spoken, "you'd better ask him instead of me. But he doesn't happen to be my boy friend, and I'd be grateful if you wouldn't call him that. The privileged person in question is in Washington." She could have bitten her tongue out as soon as the words were spoken, but it was too late then to catch them back. She had been gauche and imprudent and vindictive, as she might have been years earlier, before she had learned anything of the amenities of life. Were her good manners only a light veneer, easily cracked at the slightest provocation? She began to fear that they were. She left the party early on the pretext that she had a piece to write and went bitterly home to bed.

According to her reckoning, Thursday was the first day that she could possibly hope to hear from Bob. The first mail came early in the morning, and Léonie brought in her letters with her flaky *croissants* and her big bowl of *café au lait*. That day she waked before dawn and lay very still, under her *duvet*, waiting for the *facteur's* ring. When she heard it, she tugged at the old-fashioned bell pull by her bed, and Léonie, looking slightly surprised, but beaming broadly and breathing hard, according to her habit, appeared in the doorway.

"I've been awake a long time, Léonie. I can't seem to get back to sleep."

Léonie made a guttural sound, significant of deep sympathy.

"So I'd like my coffee now, please. As soon as you can get it ready."

"Une toute petite seconde, Mademoiselle."

"And my letters right away. Without waiting for the coffee."

This was contrary to all precedent, and Léonie was disturbed. Nevertheless, she went puffing out into the hallway and returned with a sheaf of them.

The one that Zoe was waiting for lay on top. Bob always wrote her from the office, on his father's official stationery, and she could see the words UNITED STATES SENATE—COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS stamped in blue letters on the upper left-hand corner of the white envelope, and on the opposite corner, also in blue, the scrawling facsimile of the Senator's signature. At the bottom the word ARKANSAS had been scratched out and PARIS, FRANCE written beneath it. Above, Zoe's name and address, and the name of the luxury liner on which the letter had been sent, stood boldly out.

She ripped the envelope open and tossed it aside, unfolding the crackling sheets. The letter was a long one, though it had obviously been written in a hurry, to catch the first mail after the receipt of hers. The text rushed out at her as she read it.

"DEAR ZOE,

"Your letter just came in, and I've cabled you as you asked. But, doggone it, I couldn't word the old thing either of the ways you suggested.

"Of course I know who the guy is you want to help out and as far as that goes who the lady with dishonourable intentions is, too. So why shouldn't I name names and save time and trouble? I haven't had an easy moment since Giles Arnold came and pounded on your cabin door, darn his hide, when you were kissing me good-bye last November. I've always thought if he hadn't come along just then things might have been different. Anyway, I've never wished him especially well since then. And I've had a pretty good hunch how things have been going. Only you've never said anything, so I couldn't very well either. I didn't want to put ideas into your head on the off chance that they weren't there, anyhow.

"Now I'm pretty dumb and all that, but not so dumb that I don't know you've a right to do just as you please and that you probably will. But since you've asked me how I'd feel about it, I might as well tell you that it would hurt me like hell if you carried out any such plan as you've written me about. If I thought it really was a sort of Girl Scout act, I wouldn't mind so much. But I don't. I think you've been sort of playing with the idea of getting engaged to Giles Arnold anyway, if you could let me down easy, and that you think this would be a good way to try it out. Maybe you haven't thought of it in that light and I know you generally see things pretty straight. But that's the way it looks to me. And it also looks to me as if when a girl has got to save a guy from another

dame he really isn't worth the trouble, no matter how big a shot he seems to be.

"I never was much good at writing letters, as you know, and I wish like anything that instead of sending this by the *Ile de France* I could jump aboard her myself and thrash the whole thing out with you. There are two reasons why I don't. The first—you've guessed it—is that I just haven't got the ready cash. The second is that the poor old gent is in a dreadful jam and I can't leave him to face the music alone especially as I feel it's partly my fault he got into such a mess.

"You know he hasn't made much of a showing on the floor of the Senate, though he's plugged away faithfully on his committees and done some pretty good work. But last week he said he'd decided to make a speech on the question of national repeal. I asked him if I could help him whip it into shape, and he said Mr. Puffleberger had done that already. He showed me the MSS. and I thought it was darn good. Of course, there's nothing unusual about having one of these 'public relations experts' help senators with their speeches, so I let this get by me without batting an eye. The poor old gent believed every word that was in it, so he was able to deliver it in a very earnest way, without putting anything on. I went over to the Chamber to listen to him and I was proud of him. He looked and acted just like a real statesman, the sort you read about in books. I couldn't imagine why some of the senators sitting around him began to titter. Then a whole bunch of them got up and walked out, not drifting off sort of aimlessly, the way they do all the time, but pretty pointedly. At last Norcross, who's always hated Dad, rose to a point of order. He asked the President *pro tem.* if the speech the distinguished gentleman from Arkansas was delivering wasn't exactly the same one that Mr. Nelson, the distinguished senator from Nebraska, had delivered four days ago. Once he got started he was pretty sarcastic. You see, there were phases in it about 'the peculiar situation in my state' and 'the overwhelming demand on the part of my constituents' and all that. He took Dad for an awful ride. Because, you see, it *was* the same speech that Nelson had given four days before and I hadn't caught it, because I hadn't looked at the *Congressional Record* once during that time.

"The old gent is simply crushed. I haven't been able to get him over to the Chamber since or persuaded him to see anyone; and, of course, if he keeps on hiding he'll be ruined politically. I've got to stand by until he snaps out of this fit, but it's the hardest thing I ever did. I feel that just seeing you would make all the difference in the world about everything. And if I could talk to you or get hold of you—oh, gosh, what's the use?

"Zoe, I know just how badly I must stack up beside Giles Arnold. You'll have to decide for yourself which of us you really

want. If you decide in favour of him I won't have anything more to say except that I hope you'll be happier than I'll ever be again. But don't kid yourself along any kind of an unofficial engagement. Come clean about it. That's the sort of girl you are. That's the sort of girl I love. You know how much. That is, I hope you do.

"Yours and then some,

"BOB.

"I got the old gent to go down to Hunter's Green with me last Sunday. Ronnie and Bennie are both fine and Welby is up in a wheel-chair. Bennie is just as cute as he can be and Welby is very cheerful and making all sorts of plans for the future, but it would wring tears from a stone to see him just the same. I don't see how Ronnie holds up, but she's going strong. I guess she's got what it takes. I guess you have, too."

Zoe read the letter through carefully a second time. Then she put it back in the envelope and got out of bed. She walked over to the window and looked out at the tiled roofs rising in little red pinnacles all around her. The sky above them was very soft and clear, as it is apt to be in Paris during July. As she looked at them she caught her breath, once, very sharply. The swift intake saved her from a sob.

"Anyway, I've seen them," she said aloud, defiantly. "Anyway, I've lived here. Nothing can take that away from me, as long as I live. I've had it."

CHAPTER XIII

HELEN was still fast asleep when Zoe went into her room. In her round-necked puffed-sleeved nightgown, with her fair curls tumbling around her face, she looked almost like a pretty child, dreaming of beautiful big dolls and birthday party treats. Almost, but not quite. She had regained the lovely colour which she had lost for a time after she had parted from Alfredo, but in the meanwhile something had come into her face which had not been there before. She was a woman who had been touched by love. She was not a little girl any longer.

Zoe stood watching her, reluctant to wake her. But presently Helen stirred, nestling with a childlike motion that again made her seem like a little girl. Then she rubbed her eyes with her small pink fists, and sat up, first blinking and next staring at Zoe. When she finally recognized her, she threw her arms around her friend's neck and gave her a bear's hug.

"Zoe *darling!*" she exclaimed fondly. "I'm so glad to see you! I was dreaming about you. I'm not sure yet where the dream left off and the real you began."

"That's not as unusual a situation as you'd suppose," Zoe answered. She tried not to speak satirically, and she did not free herself from Helen's embrace until she had hugged her in return. "Suppose we have our coffee together, in here. Then we can make plans while we drink it."

"I don't see how we could possibly plan for anything that would be more fun than what we've been doing already. But I'd love to talk to you while we have our breakfast. Why do coffee and crescents in bed taste so much better than tea and toast in bed, do you suppose?"

"That's easy. Because they *are* better. And because they're not a prelude to breakfast. They are breakfast. Here's your mail. I brought it along as I came. Léonie will be in with the tray in just a minute."

"Oh, there's a letter from Deauville! Isabel must be feeling better! She told me she wouldn't try to write until she was!"

Helen broke the seal unsuspectingly. As she lifted the letter out of its envelope, a small supplementary piece of paper fluttered from between its folds. Zoe could see that this was a cheque before Helen even noticed that it was there. Léonie came in with the tray, and set it down on a small table near the bed-side, panting as if it had weighed a ton instead of being laden with nothing heavier than flaky crescents, foaming milk, and filtered coffee. She breathed a doting *bon jour* to Helen, who had completely captivated her, and whom she described as *belle comme une ange*, having in mind the

small cherubs with pink cheeks and flaxen hair which adorned the altar of the parish church in the little Breton town from which she came. Then, finding that Mademoiselle did not look up from the letter with which she was obviously engrossed, Léonie withdrew to the little kitchen hung with copper pots and pans and began her campaign for the day.

Zoe poured out a cup of coffee and broke off a segment of crescent. She had been sipping and munching for some minutes before Helen looked up at her with troubled eyes.

"I've had the strangest letter from Isabel," she said in a bewildered voice. "She doesn't want me to spend the summer with her after all. Of course, she doesn't put it as baldly as that. Isabel is always so kind and tactful. I can see from the way she writes that she's trying not to hurt my feelings. But that's what she means."

"What does she say exactly? That is, if it's all right for me to ask?"

"She says that she's had a bad breakdown, that she's got to spend the summer very quietly at the seashore. She's looking for a little villa, at Deauville or somewhere else near there, on the coast. As soon as she finds one, she's going to leave the hotel and move in. She says she couldn't possibly expect me to be contented, living in a secluded uneventful way like that. But I would have been, Zoe! I'd have enjoyed a summer by the sea, in France! And I could have kept her company! She'll be so lonely! I could have read aloud to her and waited on her in all sorts of little ways. I'd have been happy doing it. I'm very grateful to Isabel. I'd have been glad to show her that I was!"

"Yes, I know. What does she suggest you do instead?"

"She says she knows you'll take the best possible care of me. She says she'll write me again, later on, to let me know when she'll be going back to the United States. She says of course we'll go home together, though she doesn't know just when. She wants to take a thorough rest cure, and be fully recovered, before she faces another Washington winter. And she says that of course I'm to be her guest for the summer, just as if we were spending it together. She says she's enclosing a cheque——"

Helen dropped the letter and began to scan the counterpane and shake the bedclothes, in search of the missing bit of paper. Zoe picked it up and handed it to her.

"It's for a thousand dollars," Helen said in an awed voice. "Why, Zoe, a thousand dollars would last for ever and ever, wouldn't it?"

"Not at the rate Isabel Windsor spends money," Zoe answered. This time she did not even try to control the note of satire in her voice. "But, sweetness, if you're going to stay with me, you can't keep this cheque. You'll be my guest from now on—not a foundling dropped on my doorstep with hush money."

"I don't understand, Zoe. I don't understand any of this."

"Well, don't try—not now, anyway. But send the cheque back to Isabel, with a sweet little note of your own. Tell her you're terribly sorry she's ill, but that as you can't be of any service to her, not even in the way of companionship, you wouldn't feel comfortable to take her money. That would be the truth, wouldn't it?"

"Why yes. But I don't want to impose on you either, Zoe. And all I've got of my own is ten twenty-dollar American Express cheques that Bob gave me for a present just as I was leaving. I don't know where he got it from, but he's always wringing money out of stones. He said he didn't want me to be utterly dependent on Isabel."

"Damned white of him. But, don't worry, you won't be. And you won't be imposing on me either. We can stretch that two hundred dollars a long way. Not that I wouldn't have been awfully glad to have you without it, though I couldn't have supported you in the style to which Isabel had done her best to accustom you. But with Bob's contribution I think I can give you just as good a time as she could. Only——"

Zoe refilled her own cup and prepared one for Helen, who had completely forgotten about her breakfast. Now she realized that she was hungry and thirsty. She bit into her crescent with appetite as Zoe went on talking to her.

"I had an important letter myself this morning, Helen. From someone you're very fond of."

"Alfredo?"

"No such luck. But you're pretty fond of Bob, too, aren't you? in a different way?"

"Oh, Zoe, of course I am! Are—are you?"

"Yes, I'm fond of Bob, too," Zoe said evenly. "I supposed you'd rather gathered, before this, that we had a sort of 'understanding'."

"I hoped so. I wasn't sure. Oh, Zoe, I'm awfully glad! There's nothing on earth that would make me so happy as to have you marry Bob! Except, of course, to marry Alfredo myself."

"I haven't said anything about marrying Bob. I'm not in a mood to marry anybody. There's nothing definite about our 'understanding.' But we do write to each other more or less regularly. And it happens I've just heard from him."

"Is—is he all right?" inquired Helen.

"Yes, he's all right. I wouldn't say he's what you'd call bubbling over with high spirits, but he's all right. He's worried about your father, though."

"Is Father sick?"

"No, he isn't sick. But he's feeling pretty low in his mind. Someone has played a dirty trick on him. He was persuaded to deliver a speech in the Senate that he thought would make a great hit. It was a speech someone else had already delivered just a few days before. It turned your father into a laughing-stock. Gosh, would I like to get my claws into the son of a so-and-so who did it!"

Zoe set down her cup with a bang and jumped to her feet. As she went on talking she paced up and down the well-ordered, pretty little bedroom, giving it the effect of having been struck by a storm. Helen shrank back a little among the bedclothes.

"It wasn't that nice Mr. Puffleberger, was it, Zoe, who did a dreadful thing like that?"

"Well, Mr. Puffleberger wrote the speech. He may not have been responsible for the slip-up afterwards. But I wouldn't put it past him at that. The damned son of a——"

"Don't, Zoe, don't swear so. I hate to hear you. It only makes things seem worse. I thought you'd practically stopped."

"Well, I had. But I've begun again. I had a reason for stopping and I've got a reason for recommencing. There's nothing that could stop me now!"

In the next few minutes Helen decided that Zoe had spoken the truth, that nothing could stop her. Her own hand shook as she tried to go on drinking her coffee and eating her crescent as if nothing had happened. But she kept shrinking further and further back among her pillows, overcome with distress because the world, which had begun to look so bright and beautiful to her again, was once more darkened and disturbed. Finally, two large tears, which had been gathering slowly underneath her lids and which she had been trying to control, overflowed from her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. Zoe saw them and came to a sudden stop.

"There, there, sweetness," she said, with a tenderness in her tone that was wholly new. "Don't cry. Please don't. I'll make a bargain with you. If you won't sob, I won't swear. The same thing is back of both, more or less. Sometimes they help a little, too. But not much. It takes more than sobbing and swearing to do that really. You and I have got to figure out what. I'm going to have Léonie bring us in some hot coffee. We haven't let this have a chance to give us a lift. But the next pot ought to."

It did. Léonie, puzzled but eager, made it extra strong and extra hot, and neither Zoe nor Helen tried to talk any more until they had consumed it. Then Zoe lighted a cigarette and began to plan out loud.

"I'm going to cable the *Examiner*," she said, "and ask Mr. Ruthven how he'd like a lightning survey of people and places further north before I bound back to the home port—not to speak of the home office—over the ocean blue. He's always told me to use my own judgment about how long it would be best for me to stay on in France, and my judgment is that I've stayed here long enough. But I haven't touched on conditions in Germany at all since I've been in Europe. I'd rather like to go there. I think he might like it, too—Bingen on the Rhine and the toys in Nuremberg and Dresden china and all that sort of thing. Then we could take a boat home from Hamburg or Bremen—a German boat. That

would give us another week of foreign atmosphere. Of course, you wouldn't have as long a summer in Europe as you'd expected. But you did have your pleasant weeks in England, and now you've had one here. If you get a couple of them in Germany on top of that——"

"It would be a lot, Zoe. And, of course, I want to go home if you think Father and Bob need me. I did hope, sort of, that I could go back to England again. The Grenvilles invited me."

"I think your father and Bob will be a lot happier if you're there, sweetness. You're a nice little person to have around. I like to have you around myself. But I think the fact that the Grenvilles do, too, is more or less beyond the point, as things stand just now. We can go into all that later on if it seems worth while. There's no law against coming back to Europe a second time or even a third one, you know. I'd like to go to England myself later on."

"There aren't any boats that go to Mexico from Europe, are there?"

"Why, yes. There are some that go from Spain. But they're not very fast or very good, and I wouldn't like to send you on one alone, for several other reasons. I've been to Spain already. I couldn't write any more stories about that, this year, very well. Do you want to go to Mexico, sweetness, no fooling?"

"Well,—yes, I do, Zoe. Veronique said something to me that made me worry about Alfredo."

She told Zoe what Veronique had said, and how she felt about it. Zoe appeared to consider it carefully.

"I think Veronique has the right idea. That is, basically. If you could have gone to Mexico this summer, instead of coming to Europe, I think it would have been all to the good. But since you couldn't—or at any rate since you didn't—I believe you'd better wait a little longer, sweetness. But I don't see any reason at all why I shouldn't go Zephyring south of the Rio Grande, after I've given things the once-over back in Washington. I'll talk to Mr. Ruthven about it. If he says yes, and you want to come along for the ride, I don't see what's to hinder."

"Oh, Zoe, do you really mean it? That you'd go with me to Mexico! Why, that would almost be too good to be true."

"Well, you come to Germany with me first, and we'll see what we can do to make it come true. I'm going to climb into my clothes now and go out to send my wire. I believe I'll send two of them, while I'm about it. It's occurred to me that the Bakers might be willing to take this flat and Léonie off my hands. I don't want to be left with the lease, or let the faithful handmaiden down either if I can help it. Though I haven't a doubt Mrs. Benedict would smooth everything over for me, if the worst came to the worst."

The worst did not come to the worst. Everything passed off, on the surface at least, with the utmost smoothness. The reply wires from the Bakers and Mr. Ruthven both came through before even—

ing, and both were highly satisfactory. "TICKLED TO DEATH TO GET APARTMENT," the Bakers telegraphed from Amsterdam, whither, with characteristic thoroughness, they had gone to look at diamonds, dykes and Dutch masters. "LET US KNOW WHEN CONVENIENT FOR US TO TAKE OVER AND WE WILL BE THERE." "APPROVE GERMANY WOULD BE GLAD TO HAVE YOU STRETCH TRIP TO SCANDINAVIA ALSO SENDING ADDITIONAL FUNDS CARE MORGAN HARGES LET ME KNOW IF YOU NEED MORE STILL," cabled Mr. Ruthven. With the two wires in her hand Zoe went out to the copper-hung kitchen to explain the situation to Léonie. Then she telephoned James Hickson to get the names and addresses of *Examiner* correspondents in Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and to Arthur Kennard to arrange for consular invoices to go, with the antiques which, according to her original plan, she had duly bought—an *armoire* in Normandy, a *bagueno* in Spain, a table in Italy, and some chairs in Portugal, all of which went together surprisingly well. Then, before she went to bed, she started her personal packing and wrote her P.P.C. notes. "Unexpectedly ordered North. So sorry not to see you again before leaving, but shall look forward to doing so many times in the future," she scribbled over and over, resting her head on her free hand and reflecting, rather ruefully, that six months earlier she had never heard of such a thing as a P.P.C. note. Well, that was something else she could set down to experience. "A thousand thanks for all your kindness," she concluded, and meant it sincerely. When she finally turned in, long after midnight, she instantly fell asleep and slept soundly and dreamlessly.

She was still sleeping the next morning when Léonie came into her room, looking so smug and satisfied that Zoe was no sooner roused than she guessed what had happened. Among other things which she had learned since she had been in France was how to interpret the expression on the face of a French servant, and she knew that only a tip of outrageous size and a conviction that an affair of the heart was involved could account for the way Léonie looked now.

"*Monsieur le commandant* is in the salon," Léonie said unctuously. "He pressed me to announce him, even though I told him you were still slumbering. He desires to see you at once, *en toute intimité*."

"I don't receive gentlemen *en toute intimité*. You know that perfectly well, Léonie. Tell *Monsieur le commandant* that I'll see him in an hour if he cares to wait or come back, but that I must have my coffee and my bath and get dressed first. You may bring me my coffee at once."

Léonie withdrew slowly, muttering something as she went, her broad smile fading to a stubborn and sulky expression. Zoe jumped out of bed and locked the door after her retreating figure. She was just in time. The next instant Giles was knocking on it.

"Let me in, Zoe. I've got to see you. It's very urgent."

"I'm sorry, Giles. I'm not up yet."

"Well, good God, you're not such a prude that you won't see me in bed, are you?"

"You can call me a prude if you want to. But you're not a *valet de chambre* or a doctor or a relative or my husband, actual or prospective. You're not even a very old friend. You're an officer and presumably a gentleman. I'd be grateful if you'd behave like one."

"I never thought you'd let pique get the better of you like this."

"I never thought you'd let fear get the better of you like this."

"What do you mean, fear?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Giles. I advise you to go into the salon and sit down and read the morning paper. I'll be along as soon as I can. I don't advise either that you should come back to my room when Léonie brings in my coffee. I think you'd be very sorry afterwards if you tried a gag of that kind."

It was because of the unwelcome certainty that this was true that Giles, after a moment's reluctant hesitation, went back to the drawing-room. He did not read the morning paper, however. He paced restlessly up and down, his expression growing more and more sombre as time dragged on, marked by the quarterly chimes from the gilt clock on the mantelpiece, adorned by the figure of a coy nymph engaged in fending off the ardent advances of an amorous god. This clock had always irritated Giles, and now it intensified the desperation of his mood. The sight of the small presents which he had given Zoe from time to time, and which she had scattered around the stiff little salon in order to give it a more home-like appearance, was also far from assuaging. So was the appearance of Zoe when she finally came into the room. Her hair was brushed back from her piquant face and up from her white neck with extreme smoothness, and her trim navy-blue dress, with its stiff, spotless collar and tight-fitting cuffs, indicated the imminence of travel.

"Good-morning," she said coolly. "What can I do for you?"

"You can tell me what the meaning of all this is."

"The meaning of all what?"

"Kennard says you're going away?"

"I think I'll mention to the Chief when I see him again that he'd better pick himself out a new Vice-Consul who knows how to keep his mouth shut. Dear little Artie shouldn't have told you that. However, I would have told you myself if you'd taken the trouble to ask me, instead of depending on other people for information about my movements."

"You said you didn't want to see me."

"I said I didn't want to see you alone until I heard from Bob again. I was completely worn down arguing with you. I didn't say I wanted you to act as if I had some contagious disease every time you saw me in public, or set all our friends to wondering why, when and how we'd parted for ever. However, that's all over and done

with now, so we don't need to start an argument about that either. I'm leaving some time late this afternoon and spending the night at Amiens. The Grand Hotel is so good that it seems pointless to push on any further for the first lap, even though I've just been there. Then I'm going to Liège and then to Cologne. I'm not sure what my route North will be after that, or whether I'll sail for home from Bremen or Gothenburg. But I can send you word about that later, if it's important you should know for any sound reason. Helen's going with me. She's very happy about it. I think that's all there is to say."

"Zoe, I didn't believe you'd run away!"

"I'm not running away. I'm going forward. I've always meant to go forward. I did lose my sense of direction for a little while. But I think I've found it again now."

"You're running away from me."

"No, Giles. You ran away from *me*. After I'd warned you. After I'd tried to make you see straight and think straight. You ran off to Isabel. Of course, you had a right to do that if you wanted to. But you can't run back again."

"Zoe, you don't understand."

"Oh yes, I do. I understand thoroughly. She's such a frail little thing you put yourself at her service. She wasn't equal to facing this hard, cold, cruel world alone. You had to pick her up when she fainted and support her until the doctor came. You had to drive her down to Deauville in your car so that you could be sure she would go comfortably to take her rest cure. And then you had to stay with her until you could leave her in good hands. But she became more and more dependent on you all the time. She couldn't bear to have you leave her, she couldn't bear to have you out of her room. She kept feeling faint again, she couldn't sleep. So you stayed—finding her lovelier and more fragile and more defenceless every minute. So defenceless that she didn't know how to resist when you forgot yourself and took advantage of her helplessness. That's the way she put it to you afterwards, isn't it? She succumbed without even the semblance of a struggle, and then she was utterly crushed—crushed with shame and stupefied with shock. She made you feel as if you'd committed a crime and you were horror-stricken and begged her forgiveness. So finally, still weeping and trembling, she did forgive you for the irreparable wrong you'd done her. And to prove that she'd forgiven you she sank into your arms again. And so on and so on until there wasn't any further question of seduction or surrender. It was all fulfilled desire and intense delight. It's not strange that in the midst of so much rapture she forgot that she had begged you in vain to take her ten days before and that you forgot you didn't want her then."

"Zoe, I never heard a decent woman talk like you."

"Giles, I never knew a decent woman to act like Isabel. I won't

say anything about the way a decent man acts and talks. But if you weren't ashamed through and through of what you'd done, why have you kept away from me all this week? Why haven't you been able to look me straight in the face? Why haven't you come and said you were sorry you'd let me down and asked me to forgive you and said we'd start over again? Didn't it ever occur to you that you had let me down? Have you been thinking all this time what you'd done to Isabel and not even realizing what you'd done to me?"

"I looked up to you," Zoe went on, disregarding the desperation in his face. "I thought you were important. I thought you amounted to something. You were my ideal of everything a man could be—handsome, brave, cultured and fine. I didn't think you were the sort of man who would ask a girl to marry him and go straight from her side to spend a week-end in another woman's bedroom!"

"Zoe!" Giles said again imperatively. But he saw that it was impossible to stop her now.

"I didn't think any man would do that," she said passionately, "not even a man who didn't amount to much. I'd take it for granted that a man—well, a man like Bob Morton—might have had his share of smut, on the wrong side of the tracks, when he was finding out what it was all about. But that would have been adolescent and inquisitive and sneaking. He would have outgrown it. He would have become mature and self-reliant and upright, if he had anything in him at all. In my letter from Bob—the one you never bothered to come and see—he said he wouldn't approve of an 'unofficial engagement' with you because a man who needed to be saved from one woman by another wasn't worth the trouble, no matter how big a shot he seemed to be. I know now he was right. He had the whole thing sized up pretty well. He said it wouldn't be as much of a Girl Scout act as I was trying to make out. He said he thought I really was playing with the idea of throwing him over, anyway. He was right about that, too."

"You mean you really might have married me after all?"

"Oh, Giles, of course I might have! Everything about you meant so much to me! I was so proud to be seen with you! I enjoyed everything we did together. I was so happy to be near you. I loved the way you looked at me and spoke to me and took hold of my hand. That night at Chambord—I wanted you, Giles. It was like a sharp pain. You were right, I was lying when I said I didn't. But I'm thankful you didn't guess how much. Because I don't want you any more. I'll never forget how kind you've been to me and how helpful. I'll never forget how much I owe you. I'll try to pay you back some time. I hope I can. I believe I can. In ways we don't see now or know about. But I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth."

"Zoe, you must let me speak to you. You must let me say everything now that I ought to have said when I first came back from
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Deauville. You must let me ask your forgiveness. I am ashamed. You must let me tell you that. Bitterly ashamed. But I'll do better. I'll never fail you again. Just give me one more chance."

"How can I, Giles? What good would it do? You're not free any more to work out your salvation. You belong to Isabel."

"No, I don't. I can't. I won't. I swear I'll never see her again if you'll stay here, Zoe, if you'll only marry me in spite of everything."

"I've told you I'm leaving late this afternoon. I'm through with Paris for the present and I'm through with you for good. I'm going forward in my profession, and I'm going home to marry Bob Morton. Maybe not right away. But sooner or later."

"Zoe, you couldn't do that. You couldn't marry a man without loving him."

"I do love him. I love him in a way that counts. We're the same kind of people. We're both made of common clay. I'm—I'm like that churn of mine I told you about. Just crockery. Isabel's Dresden china. That's what you want in your home. The churn was only a novelty. But Bob will want me always. We understand each other. We speak each other's language. We have the same set of standards and the same sort of ideals. I see that all better now than I did at first. I thought once I wanted more than he could give me. I don't any more. I think he can give me enough. I wanted to be able to give more myself to the man I married than I can give Bob. But I know I can give him all he wants, too. I'll make him happy. We'll make each other happy. I'm not going to keep on reaching for the moon when it comes to love—only when it comes to my work. I'm going to take what I can hold in my two hands and keep it, right here on earth."

"But you might fall in love with someone else."

"I did fall in love with someone else. I fell in love with you. If I hadn't I wouldn't dare marry Bob. I'd think that it wouldn't be fair, because the great love of my life might still be ahead of me, and then there would be hell to pay. But the great love of my life isn't ahead of me. It's behind me. It's worse than that. It's dead. A lovely lady killed it with her own lily-white hands."

All the time that Zoe had been talking she had stood by the door, as if poised for instant flight. Now at last she came forward and put her own hands on Giles' arm.

"I talked to you for nearly half an hour without mentioning hell, Giles," she said whimsically. "That was doing pretty well, wasn't it, for me? I reckon you've made me into a lady in spite of myself. I believe you've done a pretty good job, too. I tell you what. Every time I start to swear, after this, I'll stop and think of you. That means I'll think of you pretty often for a while. Little by little, though— It isn't going to be easy. But in the end— Good-bye, Giles. Good-bye, dear. There honestly isn't anything more for us to say to each other."

PART V

CHAPTER XIV

HELEN and Zoe came home the middle of August, tourist, on the *Milwaukee* from Hamburg, in a bare clean little cabin with old-fashioned bunks, no wardrobe, and a small stark wash-basin. Zoe had plenty of money to buy a first-class ticket for herself, but it would have been hard for her to stretch her budget to get one for Helen too. Besides, she knew that Helen was already worrying about the strain she had put on Zoe's finances, though Zoe had tried to reassure her by telling her that she was really earning her own way. She had done all the packing and unpacking from the beginning, and she had learned to take charge of the accounts and the mailing, to pay bills and to tip servants and check the condition of the car. She did not do any of this as quickly and efficiently as Zoe; nevertheless, the accumulation of her small services saved Zoe so much time that she was able to collect her material and whip it into shape more rapidly than she had dared to hope; and Helen helped her with this too, by jotting down items of interest on her own initiative, which she handed over to Zoe for redrafting, and by teaching herself to type with the two-finger hit and miss method. Zoe teased her, saying that she would soon be demanding a commission and a by-line of her own. But Helen never minded Zoe's teasing. She revelled in it, and swelled with pride at the thought that she was helping Zoe, who had rapidly supplanted Isabel in her heart as an object of adoration.

As a matter of fact, Helen enjoyed the voyage on the *Milwaukee* much more than she had enjoyed the voyage on the *Leviathan*. She did not mind the cramped quarters and the plain equipment in the least. She was not shut out from a charmed circle, as she had been on the east-bound trip. The boisterous "college crowd," the joyous, impecunious honeymooners, the ambitious young teachers and thrifty, self-supporting men and women of middle age, even the gentle, mistful spinsters and desiccated bachelors having their last—and in many cases their only—fling, who were her fellow passengers now, all hailed her as one of their own kin and kind, and made her gladly conscious of their delight in her company. She had no time for solitary contemplation of the sea foam while whispered conferences on matters of international import took place behind her lonely back. She was herself the centre of a rollicking group. Zoe had work to do. She was turning out an article a day,

seated on a collapsible stool in front of the wash-basin, over which she placed a board where she set her battered portable, and pounding away for hours on end. It was only in the late afternoons and the long gay evenings that she allowed herself to be caught up by the crowd. But Helen was free for merrymaking from the moment of her belated awakening in the morning until the last light was out at night, and Zoe encouraged her to make the most of it.

"You'll soon be paying official calls with Mamma every afternoon and going to all the dull parties given by the 'right' people every evening," she said prophetically. "You better get some real fun out of life while you can. You may not have any more until you and I start for Mexico."

"Well, anyway I'm having it now, thanks to you. Oh, Zoe, I never can tell you how grateful I am for everything!— When do you think we can start for Mexico?"

"I can tell you better after I've been to the office. But not right away, sweetness. I'm sure of that much. So make up your mind to be patient."

As the *Milwaukee* left the chilly Banks and slid slowly into the Gulf Stream, one of the much bebuttoned little cabin boys brought Zoe two radiograms. She was still in seclusion, still pounding away at the insecure typewriter, but the task she had set herself was almost done. She swung around on her stool, lighted a cigarette, and tore her messages open.

The first one she read was from Ruthven. "CONGRATULATIONS ON FINE JOB FROM START TO FINISH"—it said—"PLEASE REPORT AT OFFICE EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT MATTER OF IMPORTANCE." She read it through three times, with the strange choking sensation evoked by the consciousness of hard-earned and recognized success before she even remembered the other radiogram. "CRAZY TO SEE YOU MEETING YOU IN NEW YORK EXPECT TO GO OFF AT HALF-CKOCK BOB," she read, with a feeling of anticlimax for which she reproached herself. It was too bad that Bob had not sent the message to Helen instead of to her, she thought. Helen adored Bob, it would have meant so much to her to get it, and to tell all her new-found friends that she had heard from her brother, that he would be on the dock waiting for her. Now Zoe would have to tell Helen that it was she who had heard from Bob, and there would be a little smothered pang of disappointment and jealousy in Helen's gentle heart, because Bob had thought of someone else first. It was really a shame. Well, she had better break the news to Helen right away and get it over with. After the first natural resentment had passed off, Helen would be so glad Bob was coming to New York, she would almost forget it was not primarily his sister whom he wanted to see—

The *Milwaukee* swung into the harbour very early in the morning, and Zoe, who had gone on writing until the last moment, was

still in her cabin when Helen, leaning impatiently over the rail and searching the waiting mob with eager eyes, caught sight of Bob among the dozens of men with upturned faces who were crowding forward against the restraining ropes. She cupped her hands and called to him.

"Bob! Bo-o-ob! Look over to the le-e-ft!"

Bob heard her, and shouted something in reply, looking to the left; but still he did not see her.

"Right he-e-re! Underneath the second smo-o-ke sta-a-ck!"

He looked under the second smoke stack and saw her, and shouted again. She was still too far off to see the exact expression on his face; it was blurred. But she knew that it changed, that there was disappointment in it instead of expectation.

"Hello there! Where's Zoe?"

"She's downstairs. I mean she's below decks. She's still writing."

"Well, for the lava Mike, go get her. The old tub will be tied up in a minute and I want to see you girls coming down the gangplank at the double-quick gallop!"

Helen nodded and waved her hand. Then she started off to get Zoe. But Zoe shook her head impatiently and went on typing when Helen came into the cabin.

"Just give me a couple of more minutes, sweetness, and I'll have this off my chest. I got interrupted. Some of the newspaper boys are on board already and they've been bothering me."

"How did they get on? I thought nobody got on."

"At Quarantine. Run along, sweetness, do. I'm getting jumpy. I'm so scared this won't be done."

"But, Zoe, I've seen Bob. He was terribly disappointed because you weren't on deck with me."

"He'll see me soon enough. Please, sweetness!"

Helen was outside, but she did not go back on deck. She did not want to face Bob again without Zoe. She stood patiently in the corridor, and eventually she heard Zoe tearing a sheet of paper out of the typewriter and snapping the cover down on the machine. When Zoe came out of the cabin, she was carrying a big manila envelope, besides the typewriter and a small soft patent-leather hat-box, and her purse and her landing card, held so that this would show. She managed to do it all without looking either clumsy or heavy-laden, but there was no doubt that her hands were very full. Helen offered to help her carry some of her things, indeed she tried to take the hat-box away forcibly. But she was secretly glad when Zoe prevented her from doing so. She wanted to have her arms free to throw around Bob's neck.

It was a long while before they got down the gangplank because by this time it was crowded. There was no more chance of being among the first to descend it, as there would have been had Zoe not felt obliged to finish the final line in her last piece. Bob was

directly at the bottom of the gangplank, and Helen was able to throw her arms around his neck, just as she had hoped, before she actually had both feet firmly on the dock. But the kiss he gave her in return was quick and casual; he did not seize her in a bear hug as he had always been in the habit of doing and she knew that he was looking past her as she kissed him.

"Where's——" he began again. Then with immense relief and joy he shouted, "Zoe! Zoe! Gosh, but it's swell to see you!"

He had managed to get his arms around her, in spite of the pushing crowd, in spite of all the packages she was carrying. It was to her that he gave the bear hug, and there was nothing casual or quick about his kiss now either. But Zoe was not returning any of it at all, Helen could see that. Zoe had managed to turn her head so that Bob could only kiss her cheek, and she was looking past him at somebody else, just as Bob had looked past his sister.

"Hold on, Bob. There's Bert Scruggs and some of the rest of the gang."

The scrawny scion of the *New York Enterprise*, accompanied by numerous journalistic cronies letting forth welcoming whoops, was loping forward at his usual ungainly but rapid gait. Apparently encouraged by Bob's example, Bert greeted Zoe with great heartiness himself, and Helen felt that she responded to this display of affection much more cordially and spontaneously than she had to Bob's embrace. Evidently Bob felt the same way about it. He seized Zoe's arm and endeavoured to propel her rapidly in the direction of the Customs, leaving Helen to tag along behind alone.

"The W's are right over here. There won't be any trouble about the baggage. Dad wrote a letter to the Captain of the Port—that is, I wrote it and he signed it. And I've got a man down here from the Commodore too, helping out, who certainly knows his business. I spent last night there, so I'd be sure to be on time. Gee, Zoe, you look great! Gosh, but it's swell to see you!"

"Listen, Bob, you said that before. You sound as if you were in your second childhood! Don't get to repeating yourself, at your age! What's happening to Helen? The M's aren't over here. They're way over on the other side. Bert can look after me. Not that I really need any looking after. You go and see to Helen. She's terrified. She's been sitting up nights listing every perfume bottle and handkerchief that she's bought and still she's sure that she's going to be fined and jailed." Then as Bob paid no attention to anything she was saying, but continued to walk along with his arm around her and his beaming face close to hers, Zoe added, more imperiously, "Look here, you've hurt that poor kid's feelings dreadfully already. You don't have to spoil her homecoming entirely, do you?"

"No, but——"

"We'll have a chance to talk on the train. Bob, you're bothering me."

"I don't believe it. If I was, sure enough, you'd swear at me. Gosh, Zoe, what have I said wrong *now*?"

She did not answer at all this time, but he knew that there was something, and he went off to look out for Helen, feeling hurt and puzzled both. Afterwards, when they were on the train, things were not any better. It appeared that Bert was going back to Washington, too, and they all piled into a drawing-room car together, stacking the girls' gaily labelled luggage high about them and ordering ginger ale and white rock from the distracted porter. But though the liquor the boys had brought was good, for bootleg, and the atmosphere of the closed car essentially intimate and cosy, Bert was disposed to monopolize Zoe by talking shop, and Zoe was disposed to let him. He wanted to talk to her about Mussolini and Primo de Rivera and the aftermath of the miniature revolution in Austria and the communistic drift in Germany, and apparently she was glad to have him. Helen and Bob were driven to family platitudes.

"How's Father now? Really better?"

"I reckon so. I hope so. But this extra session is dragging on and on. It drags him along with it and wears him down. I don't think the Senate is ever going to get through rewriting the House Tariff Bill. Dad's getting so he's making drafts in his sleep. But he's mighty glad you're getting home, honey."

"Is Mother in Washington still?"

"No, the heat got so bad she said she couldn't stand it. She's up at Blue Ridge Summit. It's pleasant there. Dad and I get over once in a while for week-ends. She thought you'd like to join her right away."

"I want to see Father first. And maybe Zoe is going to take me to Mexico."

"You certainly sent in a string of scoops," Bert was saying distractingly when Bob tried to dispute this point. "But you didn't write much about the Youth Movement in Germany. Didn't you see anything of it?"

"Sure, I saw a lot of it. But I salted away a good deal of the stuff I thought would keep. Some of it's about that queer, crazy corporal, Adolf Hitler, you know. There's a lot of opposition to the Young Plan being drummed up in Germany. And France is awfully worried about the amount of gold being drained away from the Reich, on account of jeopardizing reparations."

It was like that all the way to Washington, dreary and disappointing for Helen and Bob both, in spite of the liquor and the cosiness. Bert did not seem to have the least idea that he was in the way, and, indeed, Zoe did not seem to feel that he was. As they approached Silver Springs he informed her that Lisa Fendall and

Brenda Bryant had got her apartment opened and cleaned for her, and a full-time maid engaged. Bert chuckled when he referred to the maid.

"She's as black as the ace of spades," he said. "But her name's Pearl Gray."

"Bert, you're making that up. You never could resist a good gag."

"The *Enterprise* checks and double-checks the accuracy of all news items," he retorted. "I did it this time. That's her name all right. She's cooking supper, and the girls are waiting to eat it with you in your own happy home. Probably your bed's turned down and your bath water drawn. I wouldn't put anything past Pearl Gray. Anyhow, you don't need to go to a hotel, even tonight."

"That's grand, Bert. Did the girls have any trouble clearing the furniture I sent through Seibold?"

"Not a bit. It's all up and it looks swell. Those charts you drew for them were the cat's whiskers. They couldn't go wrong with those."

"I can't wait to see it all in place. You'll stay to supper with the girls and me, won't you, Bert?"

"Sure. You and I can take a taxi right up there. Are you sure you know which is your baggage and which is Helen's?"

It was the first time that he had so much as referred to Helen. She did not mind because he had not noticed her when Zoe was around, but she was beginning to mind very much because Zoe was neglecting Bob for Bert. She forgot all about her own disappointment and her own hurt feelings in thinking of Bob's. She was sure that her brother had intended to have supper with Zoe himself, that he had expected to see her alone that evening. When she first thought of it she had felt worried, because she wanted so much to keep him with her. Now she felt worried because she knew he was not going to have what he wanted. It was a very bewildering world——

"Bert and I will catch the first taxi we can," Zoe was saying to Bob. "Don't bother about us. I'll be busy all day tomorrow reporting in at the office and getting unpacked. I had a radiogram from Mr. Ruthven the same day I got yours. He said it was something very important. And I have a lot of stuff to straighten out. But I should think that by dinner-time—— How about coming to dinner with me tomorrow night, Bob, to see if Pearl Gray is really as good as Bert says? Around seven?"

She began gathering up her precious packages again briskly. Helen saw the expression in Bob's face as he watched her doing it, but this time he did not try to put his arms around Zoe. He did not offer to help her with what she was doing, either. He only nodded, and Helen wondered how anyone who was as kind-hearted as Zoe could be so cruel to anyone who was as patient as Bob.

"Glad to," he said briefly. "Thanks. So long, if we do get separated at the station."

Bob came to Helen's room late that night, just as he had always done, and then they talked to each other, in the same way as they had always done that, too. Helen felt much better afterwards because Bob told her exactly how he felt about Zoe and the way she had behaved.

"I'm awfully sorry I hurt your feelings, kid. I didn't mean to, honest."

"It was silly of me to feel hurt. Of course you wanted to see Zoe most. I would've felt the same way if Alfredo had been there. But Bob——"

"Yes, honey."

"I don't think Zoe acted like herself, do you?"

"Sure I do. She acted just like herself. That's one of the best things about Zoe. She always does act like herself instead of trying to act like someone else."

"But she hurt *your* feelings. I could see that she did, although you were so nice about it."

"Well, yeah. I thought she would be a little gladder to see me than she was. And I didn't think she'd mind having me show how glad I was to see her, hugging her and kissing her like it was natural I should want to. But gosh, Zoe's never been an easy necker, you know that yourself. I wouldn't think half so much of her if she was. And I suppose she thought I took too much for granted. I ought to have waited until she gave me some kind of a high sign instead of rushing her like that. After all, we're not engaged. Not officially."

"I know, Bob, but it wasn't just that. She carried all those packages *on purpose*, and she talked and *talked* to Bert Scruggs. You don't suppose she has a crush on him, do you?"

"Gosh, no. Bert isn't a man to Zoe at all. He's an A 1 reporter. Zoe doesn't get thrills at the sight of any old pair of pants, kid. I think it might give her a little more of a thrill to know that I'd gone over to New York on purpose to meet her. But what she was really thrilled about, just then, was having done a good job and having an expert like Bert Scruggs prove it to her. So I'm glad she didn't pretend anything else. And after she's talked to Ruthven, too, so that's off her chest, and she knows what he's going to give her to do next, she'll begin to relax. Then she'll remember where I come in. She's remembered already. You heard her ask me to dinner tomorrow night."

"But you'd hoped——"

"Sure I'd hoped. But I reckon, if I've waited nine months to see her alone, I can wait one more day without its killing me. I've got to, anyway. But I've an idea she'll make it up to me. I bet that

tomorrow night, when I get to her place, she'll be glad to have me there, and show it."

"Oh, Bob, if she only *will*!"

She did. The door of her apartment was opened for him by an immense but immaculate negress, impeccably uniformed, whom he rightly divined to be Pearl Gray; and though he had a momentary pang of fresh disappointment because Zoe had not flung it wide for him herself, he recognized that Pearl Gray was part of the picture which Zoe had been determined to achieve, and that he must not spoil her pride in the fact that she had done it. The maid took his hat, in accordance with accepted standards of this trivial rite, and informed him that Miss Wing was expecting him and was waiting for him in the living-room, the curtained door to which she indicated with a clean and capable hand. Then she walked firmly away in the direction of an unseen kitchen whence appetizing odours were agreeably wafted.

Bob drew back the curtain quietly and looked into the living-room. Yes, he said to himself again instantly, this was what Zoe had been determined to have, and he was thankful that she had got it. She had worked long and hard for it; she had it coming to her. And gosh, what a place for a man to come to at night himself and find the girl he loved waiting for him! Already the room had the finished perfection of one that had been planned for a long time, with taste and care and a loving, instinctive knowledge of what made a dwelling-place home-like and beautiful. The carved European antiques, the splendid sombre painting over the mantel-piece, the jewel-coloured Persian rug, the luxurious American sofa and easy-chairs, and the soft lights and bowls of bright flowers—all these harmonized with each other, all these belonged to each other. And in the midst of them Zoe was standing, watching and waiting to see if he would notice them and appreciate them; Zoe in trailing grey lace, as soft and light as a summer cloud, made into some sort of a strange, beautiful dress which had flowing sleeves that fell away from her white arms, and a flat frill folded over her white breast, below the string of green jade that hung around her neck.

He crossed over to her and stood beside her, still very quietly. He did not try to touch her. He only spoke to her.

"Well, it all came true, didn't it?" he said. "Because you made it, Zoe. My, but it's beautiful! You've spent part of the day putting on the finishing touches, haven't you? That's why you didn't want me to see it last night, isn't it? You were right, too. Gosh, but I'm happy about it! Because it's partly for me, isn't it? I mean, you didn't make it look like this just for yourself, did you? It was for both of us, wasn't it, Zoe?"

"Oh Bob, I was so afraid you wouldn't say that! I was so afraid you wouldn't know it. If you hadn't understood——"

"But I did, Zoe. I have understood, almost from the beginning. And almost everything. Not that I could figure out what used to become of you, when you kept vanishing from view, until you told me! Do you remember that night at Fort Myer?" He laughed and because he did she did, too, and with their laughter something that had still seemed strained and tense about their meeting went out of it. He knew that now he could put his arm around her, that she was waiting to have him, and that when he kissed her this time she would not turn her face away from him. "I even understood about yesterday," he said, "after I caught on. I was pretty dumb at first. But I'm good at learning, if you'll only give me a chance. You'll do that, won't you, Zoe?"

Afterwards, when they sat on the sofa together, drinking cocktails which were served in small silver goblets from a silver shaker, Zoe told him about her interview with Mr. Ruthven. It was the first thing she wanted to talk about, as Bob had known it would be. Mr. Ruthven had been unstinted in his praise of the European articles. Indeed, he had told her that both he and Mr. Kahn, the owner of the *Examiner*, felt she had it in her to become an outstanding foreign correspondent. They thought she had laid all the groundwork for such a special job herself, and now they were prepared to push her. They would be glad to send her back to Europe in the early spring, though they thought it might possibly be time to abandon the *Zephyr*, or at least the title and style that included it, and get down to more serious subjects, more seriously treated, than any she had dealt with so far. But that could be decided later. Meanwhile they had asked her if she had any suggestions for the immediate present—she said "they" because Mr. Kahn, whom she had never even seen before, had sat in at the conference, too—indeed, it had taken place in his office. She had suggested a trip to Mexico first because she had half promised to take Helen there; but Mr. Ruthven and Mr. Kahn had not warmed to this idea. It was not as if there were a good motor road all the way, so that she could go bounding along by car, sending in sketches every day; if she went by train or boat they would be left a whole week without a piece; and people did not have the same interest in Latin America that they did in Europe. She was afraid Helen would be terribly disappointed, but there it was——

"Well, I'm sorry for the poor kid, but I can't help wishing she'd put Alfredo out of her mind and concentrate on someone else. What about that young Englishman she met, Grenville something or other?"

"Guy Grenville? Oh, he has all the right qualifications for her, just as Veronique had them all for you. But you're a stubborn pair. You don't fall in love to please your parents."

She smiled engagingly and reverted to her interview with Mr.

Ruthven and Mr. Kahn. After they had turned down the Mexican suggestion, she had broached one about a series on lobbying, and they had both leapt at it. Of course, it was that dreadful thing which had happened to Bob's father that had made her think of it; she really hoped she could be helpful. Anyway, Mr. Kahn and Mr. Ruthven thought such a series would make even more of a stir than the one she had written on nepotism, the one that had made Bob so angry. Since he was bent on bringing up the past, did he remember how he had jumped over the desk and tried to shake her? She laughed gleefully, with the little tinkling sound ending in a half-chuckle which Bob loved to hear; and then she said, oh yes, the *Examiner* had given her a raise, too; she was getting to be a pretty rich girl; she hoped no one would marry her for her money. And finally she asked Bob why he hadn't written her about his own pieces and sent her clippings.

Vaguely he wondered again how it happened that she did not say "why in hell," and realized that her manner of talking had changed even more than her appearance. But he was so happy because the essential Zoe was still there underneath the beautiful Paris clothes and behind the softened speech that he did not bother to ask her, or even to puzzle about the enigma, unaided, for very long. The pieces did not amount to much, he said, with sincere disparagement of his own efforts; he had written the one about the D.A.R. just to please and placate his mother, just to prove he could get back into the *Examiner* again; Mr. Ruthven had promised to let him have the assignment, and he had taken the editor up, that was all. It was not much of an assignment for a man; probably, if it had been, Ruthven would not have let him have it, after all. The paper usually set spiteful little female cubs to doing that sort of thing. Perhaps Zoe remembered that, too? Well, yes, she did remember, in a hazy way, she said, chuckling again. Okay, he was glad to hear it. Well, it just happened that the D.A.R.lings liked his piece. They thought tardy justice had been done them. They bought a lot of extra copies of the *Examiner* to send home to the sticks. So then Ruthven asked Bob if he would be interested in writing about any other organizations with national headquarters in the capital, and Bob had said, why, yes, he would be glad to. And he had. That was all there was to it. He got twenty bucks apiece for those pieces. He knew he would never set the world on fire with anything he wrote, but twenty bucks were twenty bucks——

"I suppose that's how you got the money to give Helen ten American Express cheques. Never mind, you don't need to tell me if you're too modest. But Ruthven said the pieces were very sound—sound and informative. Those were the words he used. He said he could find a place for any number of them. Is that what you're going to keep on doing, Bob? Writing pieces that are sound and

informative, to make up for the ones I write that are spiteful and misleading?"

"You're not writing that kind any more."

"No, but I don't know whether your mother realizes it. I suppose I ought to please and placate her, too—— Goodness, did you know it was after eight o'clock? If we don't go in to dinner Pearl Gray will be giving notice before her first week's out. What's worse, the food will be burnt to a cinder."

The food was superlatively good, and Pearl Gray served it, not only expertly, but benignly. The dining-room had not advanced quite as far as the living-room in the way of equipment and adornment, but the start made in those directions was excellent. The mahogany furniture was not antique, but it was a faithful copy of a classic design. There was not much silver on the sideboard, but all that was there was good; and the embroidered doilies and monogrammed napkins, the French china with simple gold bands, the flower bowl and matching candlesticks were all the best of their kind. Bob recognized their perfection and praised it without attempting to analyse it. He and Zoe both enjoyed their dinner and talked contentedly of trivialities while they ate it. Afterwards Pearl Gray brought coffee and liqueurs into the living-room, and later still a siphon, a bottle of Scotch and a thermos jar of ice on a little painted tray. She emptied the overflowing ashtrays and picked up some rose-petals that had fallen on the Persian rug. Then she asked Zoe respectfully if there were anything else.

"No, thanks, Pearl. It's all right for you to go any time."

There was no back door to the apartment. They saw her, through the curtained doorway as she took her departure, carrying a sizable basket over her arm and looking like an entirely different woman now that she was clad in a soiled flowered print, which made her seem more enormous than ever. But Zoe only laughed, both about the print dress and the laden basket. Any disapproval she might have felt over either was clearly ephemeral. Pearl stopped and bade them a beaming good-night, saying she hoped they would enjoy themselves; she had laid aside her respectful formality with her uniform. Her heavy steps resounded on the stairway, and the front door banged behind her. Then the apartment was still again, and again Bob put his arm around Zoe's waist. The grey lace was light and soft under his hand, and there was obviously nothing heavy or stiff underneath it. He felt very happy.

"While you were talking to Ruthven and Kahn today," he asked, trying to sound casual, "you didn't say anything about personal plans, did you?"

"What sort of personal plans?"

"Well, getting married, for instance."

"No. Because I'm not thinking of getting married just now, Bob."

"But you told me——"

"I told you I'd fixed this place up for both of us. I have. I want you to come here. I'm happy to have you here. That is—the way you are tonight."

"Not any other way?"

"No. Not yet, anyhow. Doesn't this satisfy you, Bob?"

"Of course it doesn't. You know that."

She did not instantly answer. When she did it was in an unexpected way, with a candour of which he knew few girls would have been capable.

"As a matter of fact, Ruthven asked me some questions. He'd been hearing rumours. It's amazing how things get around. But the rumours weren't about you and me. They were about Giles Arnold and me."

"I see," Bob remarked, trying to keep his voice under control so that it would sound natural.

"He was very much relieved when I told him there wasn't anything in them. He reminded me that the wife of a naval officer could never be a great foreign correspondent, that she'd be bound by all sorts of rules and regulations. She wouldn't have any freedom of expression at all. Not that I needed reminding. I'd figured that all out for myself."

"Is that why you gave up Arnold?" Bob asked, still making the same desperate effort.

"No; as it happens, it isn't. But I didn't think it was necessary to go into all that with Ruthven. All I thought I had to tell him was the simple fact that I wasn't going to marry Giles. Just the same, it didn't look to me like the best moment for telling him I might marry someone else."

"Perhaps you can find a good moment to tell him so pretty soon, though."

"Yes, I might. But I doubt if I do. There's one thing I haven't told you, Bob, about my talk with Ruthven. I suppose I may as well tell you that, too. It wasn't all smooth sailing. We disagreed radically on one point."

"Was it an important point?"

"Yes, rather. He'd heard another rumour, and he thought I might give the paper another scoop. By telling all about Giles Arnold and Isabel Windsor. Of course, I wouldn't. I said that, as far as I knew, their relationship was as pure as the driven snow. Which was a da—which was an awful lie. He knew I was lying, and he knew I knew he did. It was a very awkward moment all around. He was very much annoyed with me. I wouldn't have won out if the rest of my stuff hadn't been good enough to make up for not delivering this one spicy story."

"What was there to tell?"

"Plenty."

"So that's why you didn't marry Giles!"

"Partly. Mostly, I reckon. But it was partly on account of your letter, too. I liked your letter a lot, Bob. There was good stuff in it, something to tie to. It made sense to me. And it was sweet besides."

"I'm glad there's something about me that you like a lot."

"There are any number of things about you that I like a lot. If there weren't, you wouldn't be here, on the shady side of midnight, with your arm around my waist. But liking you a lot isn't necessarily loving you a lot."

"Did you love Giles Arnold a lot?"

"I thought I did, for a little while. Now I'm not so sure. Maybe I just loved something impersonal I thought he stood for, and this was the only reason I was so cut up when I found he really didn't."

"Were you badly cut up, Zoe?"

"Yes. Very badly. It hurt like—it hurt terribly. It doesn't hurt any more. At least, not much. Not all the time."

"I see. Well, I won't plague you, Zoe, if that's the way things are. I didn't realize they'd been quite so bad. I'll drum up a little patience. But I'd sort of hoped we could get married in time to go away together for the week-end of Labour Day."

"Labour Day! Why, that's only about a week off!"

"I know. I say, I see now that would be too soon. But while I was in New York, I got the idea of having a week-end there with you. I even had a wild flight of fancy about trying to persuade you to go straight from the boat to City Hall. Of course, I saw right away that wouldn't work—it would've made you bolt like a skittish filly and it would have hurt Helen like anything besides. It never occurred to me when I first had this bright idea that if you went off with me, she'd be left high and dry to get back to Washington alone as best she could."

"I'm glad something of the sort finally dawned on you. I certainly would have taken you for an out and out lunatic if it hadn't."

"Well, I don't know. It wasn't mere madness. It might have been worked out some way. But since it wasn't, we'll have to work out something else. We could go back there. I looked at suites while I was at the Commodore. There are some small ones at the ends of the corridors that aren't expensive at all—a parlour looking out on Forty-second Street that's about as big as a minute, and a connecting bedroom that isn't much bigger. But that has two windows, because it's on a corner, and one of the windows looks down over the East River. It's pretty, at night, when the lights are on. Those suites seem awfully far away from everything, when you shut the door to the outer corridor, because you see, placed the way they are, there's no passing by, and they're cheery and clean and

comfortable. We could have a little world of our own in one of them, Zoe, if you were only willing. And it would be so simple for us to get married. It isn't as if we had to plan for a real wedding."

"It'll probably surprise you to know I've always thought I'd like a real wedding. With a veil and lilies and everything. Not a big one, but all the trimmings. My sister, the one who's married such a prosperous contractor in Louisville, has a nice little house. I know she would be tickled to death if I went there to be married. In the spring, say, before I go back to Europe, or in the fall when I get home again. That would be better still. I could straighten out my status at the office and make it secure by then. It's still a little shaky because I acted up today. And I could go down to Kentucky and get ready to be married the way I'd like to. I'm sure Mr. Ruthven would let me have a good vacation if I put the whole thing up to him in the right way at the right time. Then we could have a nice long quiet honeymoon, in the mountains somewhere or beside a lake or at the seashore."

Bob shook his head. "You don't need to put on a veil and carry lilies, Zoe, to look beautiful to me. Or to make me know you deserve them. Lots of girls who wear them don't, you know. Lord, when I think of all the pregnant brides I've seen, sporting veils! Take Veronique, for instance."

"Bob, I didn't believe you'd say a thing like that."

"I shouldn't have. I'm sorry. I think the world of Veronique, you know that. Just the same, she isn't in the same class with you. There aren't many who are. Gosh, but you're a good girl, Zoe, and I love you so I just can't help telling you how I feel about it! And if I could see you standing at the window in that little bedroom at the Commodore, looking out at the lights, dressed in a long white nightgown——"

"I don't own such a thing as a long white nightgown. I have a few short ones, blue and pink. But mostly I wear striped pyjamas."

"Well, you could *get* a long white nightgown, couldn't you, for the luva Mike? And go and stand beside the window, just to humour me? I know exactly how you'd look. And I would come and put my arm around you——"

"You've got your arm around me now, Bob."

"Yes, I know. But in a few minutes, if I don't clear out of my own accord, you'll send me out on my ear. If I knew you wouldn't do that—if I knew you *couldn't*—if I knew you'd have to stay there with me, and that the bed would be turned down—all smooth and fresh—beside that open window with the lights shining over the river——"

"I won't send you out on your ear. We'll see a lot of each other from now on, Bob. I promise you that. But I'm not ready to be married. I don't feel the way you do. Perhaps I never shall."

"I know, Zoe, I know. I understand how you feel now. But

perhaps by and by you'll feel differently. Towards me, I mean. And I won't interfere with your writing, Zoe, ever. I know how much that means to you. I can't say I'm sold on the idea of having you built up as a famous foreign correspondent. Not only because I'd miss you like hell when you went away from me, but because I'd look so foolish, staying here and plugging along as my father's secretary while you went dashing around all over the world with princes and potentates. I'd feel foolish, too. But I can take it. You're worth it to me and then some. And of course I know you wouldn't want to have a baby. I wouldn't expect you to do that. I'll see that you don't. I can't put it into words with a girl like you——"

"You can put anything into words that you want to, Bob. I understand, too. That isn't the trouble. And I wouldn't shirk if I married you. That is, I'd try not to. I'd try to give you all I've got in me to give to anyone. Only that's not an awful lot, right now."

"It's enough for me. I'd rather marry you tonight, Zoe, and take the chances that go with it than the chances I'll take if I don't. I know what those are like already. I feel as if I couldn't stand any more of them."

"All right, Bob. We'll go ahead on that basis. By slow degrees. It's been pretty nice tonight just like this, hasn't it?"

"Yes," he said honestly. "It has. But you can't get me to say, Zoe, that I don't think it will be a lot better still after we're married, no matter how many times you try. You've asked me that question twice now, differently, but I've still got the same answer for you. I'd lots rather know you can't put me out than to know you can, even if you say you're not going to. I'm going now, before we come to grips over it. That is, if you'll give me something that could actually count for a kiss first."

Eventually he consented to designate what she gave him as coming within that class; but he did not pretend to himself that it had the ardour and abandon of the long embrace she had given him, in the hot hotel room where she had first admitted that she loved him a little, or of that other kiss, so significant and so splendid, with which she had bidden him good-bye when she went to Europe. He knew, from those two experiences, that Zoe did not lack the capacity either for feeling or for revealing intense emotion; yet now she seemed helplessly remote and numb. He raged, with added waves of resentment, at the knowledge that it was Giles who had reduced her to this state, by wounding her in a way from which she could not quickly recover; yet, with essential fairness, he recognized the fact that if she had not broken with Giles, she would not have come home to him. It was better, a thousand times better, to have her where he could see her every day, however

unsatisfactorily, where he could watch over her and cherish her, than to have her three thousand miles away, where Giles, and countless other men for that matter, could undermine the foundation for their joint future. As she kept reminding him, there were many pleasant aspects to their present relationship; and as he kept telling her, he was willing to take his chances of winning through in the end.

Inevitably the philosophy which he endeavoured to build up was not proof against all the tests with which it was tried. He was amazed to find how often he was annoyed with Zoe, and having determined on restraint and forbearance, he was doubly irritated by his own annoyance. But he kept running up against unexpected snags. He wanted to announce their engagement, and she did not; he wanted her to wear a ring, and she did not; he wanted her to see him alone, at least briefly, every day, under conditions conducive to lovemaking, and on this score he encountered the greatest difficulties of all. They argued about these various points, and though Zoe did this objectively and impersonally, he seldom succeeded in doing so. His natural understanding and patience were perforated with sudden gusts of fury. Zoe raised him to the same sort of baffled frenzy as when he had first known her. She was eluding him still, and the fact that it was in another way did not make any difference as far as his rage was concerned.

The morning after their first dinner together, she called him up and asked him whether he would care to have her lunch with him at the Senate restaurant. His response was enthusiastic; but this enthusiasm waned when he found she had time only for a hasty snack, and that even this was constantly interrupted by other acquaintances of hers who were lunching in the restaurant at the same time and who hailed her first appearance after her return with unfeigned delight. One stodgy old senator actually drew up an extra chair at the table for two which Bob had carefully reserved, and remarked that he might just as well have his apple-pie and buttermilk there as anywhere else. He seemed to have no more idea that he was intruding than Bert Scruggs had revealed, and though Bob understood about Bert, he showed less sympathy with the senator. When he and Zoe got into the private elevator, he asked her to come on over to the office, in a way that was a summons rather than a request, and she reacted most unfavourably.

"I haven't time now, Bob. I thought we could just snatch a sandwich, while I was digging out dirt. I've plunged right into that new assignment."

"It won't hurt you to stop digging for five minutes."

"I've got a date in five minutes."

"A date!"

"A digging date, you big booby. So long. See you tomorrow."

"You mean tonight, don't you?"

"No, I mean what I said and that was tomorrow. I'm having dinner with my pet Congresswomen tonight."

They were out of the elevator by this time and racing along through the warren-like passages towards the subway leading to the Senate Office Building. But when they got on the clattering little car that was just starting, Zoe played one of her old tricks. She slid out of the further side of it and darted back into the rabbit warren. When Bob tried to jump out after her, the clattering car was already well under way, and the stodgy senator, who had pursued them and was now sitting beside Bob, laid violent hands upon him and heatedly asked if he wanted to be killed.

At the moment Bob was too infuriated to care whether he was killed or not, and his rage lasted all day. By evening it had mounted to a point where it spurred him to a move which was extremely rash. He betook himself to Eye Street and loitered inconspicuously near the entrance of Zoe's new dwelling-place until he saw her emerge, dressed for dinner, and hail a taxi. As soon as this had turned the corner he went up to the door and rang the bell. Pearl Gray, already half-way into the flowered print, opened it for him unceremoniously.

"Miss Wing done gone out, sah. She gib me the ebenin' off. Ah'se jes' fixin' to go out mahself."

"Well, that's all right. I've had an early supper and I don't need anything. I knew she was going out, but something unexpected came up that I have to see her about, so I'll wait. You can go right along. I'll mix myself a drink and sit and smoke until she gets back."

Pearl Gray hesitated, but only momentarily. She brought in the little painted tray, properly equipped, and then took her slightly belated departure, bearing her basket and slamming the door after her. Bob, feeling quite composed again now that his strategy had succeeded, whiled away a long evening without difficulty. It was well after eleven when he heard Zoe's key turn in the latch. He set down his book, glass and cigarette and went out to meet her.

"Pleased to see you, Miss Wing. I hope you had a nice evening."

"I did, but I'm not much pleased to see you. How did you get in? What are you doing here?"

"Lacking a latchkey, I had Pearl Gray let me in. I'm waiting for you. What did you think I was doing—stealing the silver?"

"I don't advise you to try a trick like this very often, Bob."

"I hope this is the only time I'll have to try it. I hope that hereafter you'll give me a decent break. You haven't today."

"You promised you wouldn't interfere with my writing."

"I won't. But you're quite an efficiency expert. You ought to be able to organize your time so that you can do your stuff for the paper and still see your boy friend some time in the course of every twenty-four hours. You managed to do it all right in Paris."

"You might leave out Paris, from now on."

"That would suit me, if you've got the point."

"I've got the point all right, but I'm not much pleased at that. I never agreed to see you every day. Though, as a matter of fact, I went out of my way to have lunch with you this noon. You'd better let well enough alone, Bob. If you don't you're likely not to see me at all."

"It's a free country. You can break your engagement to me right now if you want to. But if we're going to be engaged we're going to act as if we were. I've told you I'd try to play fair, and I will. That is, just as long as you play fair. You know, you agreed to do that, too. But you have some strange lapses for a girl that's usually a straight shooter. Come clean, Zoe. Do you really think you've given me a break today?"

"I've been very busy."

"I've been very busy, too. That's not what I asked you."

"I didn't know you cared so much about coming here. I thought if I called you up and said I'd have lunch——"

"You heard what I said, Zoe. Come clean."

"Oh, Bob, for goodness' sake! All right, you win. We may as well get this settled some way."

It was not, however, settled for good and all as easily as that. She did not run away from him again, and when she was dining out she managed to see him for a cocktail beforehand or a nightcap afterwards. But she did not contrive ways of suggesting that he might be included in the company with which she went about, nor did she invite him to become automatically a member of any small congenial group which she might be entertaining herself. Eventually he raised this question also.

"Look here, Zoe. I'm not trying to butt in where I'm not wanted. But don't the friends of engaged couples usually take it for granted that they like to play around as a pair?"

"No one knows that we're engaged. I suppose some people have dark suspicions, but——"

"Well, don't you think it would be a good plan if they did know? You've had time to get things pretty well straightened out at the office now. I shouldn't think it would be too much of a shock to Ruthven's delicate nerves to hear that you're going the way of all flesh."

"I'm not a sassiety gal, Bob, you know that. I'm just a newspaper gal. I don't have to put an advertisement in the paper to tell the world I can get a man."

"You're dead right, one way. But it looks to me as if another way you were dead wrong. You've worked like a dog so that you could live like a lady and dress like a lady and talk like a lady—your idea of one, anyhow, and I'll say it's a good one. Well, the

girls you've wanted to live like and dress like and talk like don't keep company with boy friends on the sly. They announce their engagements and go out among the people they know with their fiancés. They're dignified about it and proud. I don't see why you can't be consistent. If you want to play the rest of the game, I don't see why you don't want to play this part of it, too."

Zoe did not answer. Bob waited for a reasonable length of time to give her a chance, and then he went on.

"You've told me not to talk about Paris, and Lord knows I don't want to, anyway. It's a sore enough point as it is. But you know darn well that, if you had decided to marry Giles Arnold, your engagement would have been announced according to Hoyle. I'm not terribly thin-skinned. But I can't help wondering whether your refusing to announce your engagement to me is because you're a newspaper gal and not a sassiety gal, or because Giles is an officer and a gentleman and it was a feather in your cap to be seen with him, and I'm a hick and a dumb-bell who's got to be kept in the background."

"Bob, I'm sorry. Truly I am. I never thought you might take it like that. It was just my side I was thinking of. But you're right, I haven't been consistent about that, either."

She took his hand, of her own accord, and interlocked her fingers with his, pressing them warmly.

"Just let me fight things out along those lines, will you, Bob? I don't think it'll take me all summer now that I've got the idea."

"Sure. No special hurry. But maybe you could break the good news to Ruthven the next time you find him in a melting mood. Then, if he doesn't baulk you, you could go with me to see my mother. Of course, if you could give her the idea you were consulting her about the best kind of an announcement and the best time to make it, that would be a master-stroke. And then if you could tell a few of your cronies in strict confidence——"

"I reckon I don't need to copy General Grant, do I? I reckon you've got it all planned already?"

"Well, you've certainly given me plenty of time to plan. And I think maybe it would help out the campaign if you wore this—— I know your deep dislike for anything of the sort; but still, you might take a look at it."

He fished in his pocket with his free hand and produced a small square white box. Zoe took it hesitatingly and held it without opening it.

"I wanted to give you a diamond," Bob went on, "because I believe in patronizing home products. Do you know that Arkansas is the only State in the Union where diamonds are found? You don't? Dear, dear, the abysmal ignorance of these newspaper gals! Well, anyway, that was what I wanted to give you—the finest Arkansas diamond that I could find and—ahem!—pay for. But, of

course, I knew you ought to have an emerald, a huge rectangular emerald. I thought about that a lot, too, and I was bothered because I knew I couldn't buy you one of those—not in a thousand years. Then after a while it came over me that the reason you ought to have an emerald wasn't because it was worth a mint of money, but because green was your colour, the right one to go with your hair and your skin. And you have such beautiful hands, Zoe! I simply *had* to find something worthy of them. So I began to wonder about other green stones, and then after a while I went down to Galt's and found the pleasantest salesman you'd ever hope to see. He showed me some tourmalines, and we worked out a design together— Aren't you ever going to look inside that box, Zoe, and tell me whether you think the ring's pretty?"

Zoe pressed the little spring that controlled the cover of the box. The lid flew open, revealing an ornament of great beauty. A large square stone, richly green, surrounded with small diamonds embedded in a platinum setting. Zoe sat looking at it, and a little lump came into her throat. Bob waited patiently for her to say something. Then he realized that she could not because she was crying. But finally she put her wet cheek against his, which was rather moist, too, and slowly turned her face around until their lips came together.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with you," she managed to murmur at last. "You're so everlastingly thoughtful. And you care so much. It isn't safe to care the way you do."

"Maybe not. But it has its compensations."

Bob succeeded in getting the ring out of the box and on to Zoe's finger before he left that night, and when he arrived the next evening she was still wearing it. He was pleased when he learned that she had not cheated by taking it off and carrying it around in her handbag or by concealing it with a glove. She said she had seen Mr. Ruthven eyeing it suspiciously, and, as she assumed that he could not tell an emerald from a tourmaline, he was probably believing the worst; he had not said anything, but Brenda and Bert had both jollied her about it. She had talked back without telling them much, but she had decided that, if Bob would really like to have her go to Blue Ridge Summit for the week-end, she would talk things over with his father and mother and get their reaction to the engagement. If they approved, she would consider announcing it some time soon, in any way they preferred. She supposed a few weeks more or less, or a mere form, did not matter very much one way or another as far as she was concerned. And she wanted to see Helen, anyway, to break the news about the postponement of the Mexican trip as gently and quickly as she could—

They spent the rest of the evening making pleasant plans for her impending visit to the Mortons. Her attitude was not actually

enthusiastic, but at least it was much more co-operative than it had ever been before, and Bob's spirits soared. They were so high by the time the moment for parting came that he ventured on the boldest overture he had so far attempted.

He loved to have his arm around Zoe's waist. Although she was so slim, she was very straight and strong. It did not annoy him because she did not melt into his embrace; he liked her feeling of firmness and he willingly trusted to time to make her more pliant. But he did resent the sense of distance and detachment which she managed to maintain; he wanted desperately to come closer to her. Now, as she rose from the sofa on which they had been sitting, he had a sudden inspiration. Instead of putting his arm around her in the usual way, he slid his hand underneath the belt of her dress, which was crossed surplice fashion, in a deep V, and fastened at the side with a buckle. Instantly his fingers found the firm young flesh they were seeking. He dug them into it and pulled her abruptly to him.

Her reaction was immediate and violent. It was immaterial that she could not move away from him, for the firmness which he loved to feel became a defensive rigidity on which he could make no impression whatever. Even her lips stiffened so swiftly that they were stony. For a moment, he strove, unavailingly, to overcome this passive resistance. Then he pushed her away from him, almost as suddenly as he had swept her towards him.

"Good God!" he said furiously. "Haven't you any red blood in you at all? Do you have to be as fiercely virginal as all that?"

"If I hadn't been fierce, I'd have ceased being a virgin ten years ago. I wasn't fourteen years old the first time a man tried to do the very same thing to me that you've just done—the damned dirty son of a bitch!"

She had begun to cry again. But her tears were not like those she had shed the night before, when she had wept for joy. They were hot now and bitter and uncontrolled, and as she cried she used words more crude and coarse than he had ever heard her utter, while she told him one story after another that filled him with horror. Her numbness he could still lay at Giles' door; but the remoteness he had resented went further and deeper than any deed for which Giles was accountable, or any defensiveness he himself had provoked. He learned that from childhood she had seen almost every form of human depravity. Long before she knew the words for incest, fornication, adultery and perversion, she had known the facts, and the knowledge had come cruelly and hideously. When the stream of revelation finally ceased, he was too shocked and stunned to find any words in which to answer her, and he did not dare try to touch her. He stood looking at her, dumbly and desperately, aghast both at the torrent he had unloosed and at the underlying causes for it.

He was still groping for a way to comfort her and reassure her when she rushed out of the room and fled down the corridor, locking the door at the end of it after her. He knew that it would be fatal to pursue her. But he was uncertain whether to leave, in the hope that she might recover her self-control more quickly alone, or whether to stay, in the hope that he might help her to regain inner composure. For a long time he waited, undecided and increasingly distressed. Then when his hand was actually on the knob of the entrance, he heard her coming back, and caught his breath at the sight of her.

She had taken off her rumpled dress, and in its stead had put on a soft negligee, almost exactly the same colour as her skin—white so delicately tinted with rose that he knew rather than saw that the rosy tint was there. The tears were gone from her face, and her disordered hair had been smoothed and coiled into burnished splendour. She had golden slippers on her feet, and her robe flowed away from a golden girdle.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "I'm terribly sorry I said all that. I know what you did hadn't any connection with all those awful things I told you. Don't think I don't know it. And I know how much you care and the way you care, too. I would rather you didn't make love to me the way you tried to. But it isn't because I don't trust you. I just think it's better you shouldn't for—for all sorts of reasons. They're not one-sided either. You must believe that, too. I'm so thankful you didn't run away, just because I did. I love the way you stand your ground. Come on in again and sit down. It's hours yet before you have to go home."

CHAPTER XV

THE visit to Blue Ridge Summit passed off with much satisfaction to all concerned. Even Helen was able to smother and conceal her disappointment at the postponement of her trip to Mexico because of her gladness at the knowledge that Zoe would soon be her sister-in-law. Senator Morton had always secretly shared his son's admiration for the striking girl who had shot across their dull path like a comet; and Mrs. Morton had grudgingly begun to revise her original estimate of "that common snooping profane newspaper woman" sooner than any of them suspected. In the light of Bob's journalistic reprisals, which had been far more successful, from his proud mother's point of view, than Zoe's original attacks, Mrs. Morton had magnanimously decided to let bygones be bygones, as far as Zoe's articles on nepotism and the D.A.R. were concerned; she was genuinely grateful for the new series on lobbying, and by no means blind to its great personal advantages for the Morton family; while the European material revealed such close contacts with the great and the near great, that Mrs. Morton could no longer logically regard her prospective daughter-in-law as a social liability. Besides, there were all those people who had been giving parties for Zoe since she came back—the Vice-President's daughter, two Congresswomen, Mr. and Mrs. Kahn. Zoe seemed to know everyone, to be going everywhere. She had become an outstanding figure, as well as a dazzling one.

"Zoe," Mrs. Morton said, with the air of an oracle gratified by consultation. "Zoe. Of course it would be best to have the announcement made in the name of your married sister and her husband. 'Mr. and Mrs. Joseph T. Slater of Louisville, Kentucky, announce the engagement of their sister, Miss Zoe Wing, to Mr. Robert Morton, Jr., of Mortonville, Arkansas. Miss Wing, who has recently returned from an extended trip to Europe, is a graduate of Belton College and the Missouri School of Journalism; she is a member of the *Washington Examiner* staff and also conducts a highly successful syndicate of her own, which is prominently featured in many Southern newspapers. Mr. Morton, who took both his college course and his law degree at Arkansas University in Fayetteville, now acts as secretary to his father, the junior Senator from Arkansas, besides contributing regular feature articles to the *Examiner* himself. Mr. Morton and his bride will reside in Washington after their marriage. No date has been set for the wedding.' I don't think it is necessary to mention the nature of your brother-in-law's business, Zoe. Of course, if he were an out-

standing architect, that would be different. I am sure he has a very substantial position, as a contractor, in his home town. But you know how people *are* in Washington."

"I'm sure Joe wouldn't expect you to feature him in any way, Mrs. Morton. Though it'll be quite all right for you to give the impression that he's a bluegrass aristocrat if that would make you any happier. He might think it was funny, if he ever heard of it. But after all, he isn't likely to hear of it."

"You do love to have your little joke, don't you, dear? Now have you a good likeness of yourself? I mean a portrait study made by one of the best studios? Not that newspaper pictures aren't all right in their way, of course. But for an occasion like this—— Bob had a sitting when his father went to Harris and Ewing, the way all senators do when they first arrive——"

"I had some photographs taken in Paris. My friends there thought they were very good. I'll send you one and you can see whether you think it would do."

"She's thinking about Giles Arnold again. Giles Arnold went with her to have those photographs made," Bob said wretchedly to himself, watching an expression on Zoe's face which he had learned to recognize. "Damn that man, he's got under her skin and into her blood. I can't get her away from him." Aloud he remarked, "Don't the local papers like to use pictures by local photographers best? Seeing that Dad and I went to Harris and Ewing, Zoe might go to Underwoods."

"That's a very good idea. Of course, it will hold things up a little, because we'll have to wait until I can get an appointment and choose between the prints. But that doesn't matter. It isn't as if there were any hurry about announcing the engagement."

Bob wished that he had bitten his tongue out before mentioning a local photographer. But there was no help for it now. Zoe disregarded his subsequent protests that they might as well use the Paris picture after all, since it was so handy; and she seemed to have a great deal of trouble about the appointment with Underwood and Underwood. It appeared that none of the best operators were free at the hours when she herself was at leisure. Then she was dissatisfied with the first set of proofs, though the Mortons thought they were excellent; she insisted on starting all over again.

If she had not been increasingly amenable in many other ways, Bob might have made a stand about the postponed announcement. As it was, he decided that he would be wiser to accept a setback for which he had only himself to blame. Instead of arguing with Zoe about the photographs, he asked her if she would be willing to spend the next week-end at Hunter's Green.

"Veronique's awfully eager to see you," he told her. "Not just because she likes you either. Of course she does like you a lot. But she has an idea that you might help her, if you felt inclined. She

thinks there's some local material at Hunter's Green that could be worked up into stories, and that if you found there was, you might give her a commission on what you sold. Provided you liked the stuff, of course, and felt in the mood for trying it out. She's really been as plucky as possible, and personally I'd be glad if you could help her."

"I'd like very much to go to Hunter's Green. I'd like to see Veronique and I'd like to see this local material of hers. There really may be something in it. Besides, I'm dying for a ride. I haven't been on a horse since I can remember."

They motored over to Berryville the following Saturday. It was very hot in town, but a little coolness crept into the air after they got into the country, and Hunter's Green was verdant and beautiful, with all the fall flowers in full bloom, and the water in the pool warm enough for swimming. Candace was away, on another round of visits, which, as Veronique put it, was designed to "bring things to a head," as far as her lagging love affair was concerned; but Bennie was very much in evidence. He had developed into a sturdy and somewhat belligerent-looking baby, inclined to stare and scowl, except when he was roused to mirth; then he roared with laughter. His eyes and his hair were both black, and his cheeks were red as apples; Veronique called him Bennie the Brigand, in tones of doting affection. He sat up now, straight and unsupported, in his old-fashioned cradle, and amused himself indefinitely with rubber rings, rattles, and limp-looking toy animals, as long as he was permitted to do so in the company of his parents and their friends. When he was left alone, however, he burst into lusty howls; so Veronique picked him up, cradle and all, and carried him wherever she went herself about the house, and took him in a light perambulator over the grounds and through the stables. She was not closely confined any more, for Welby had acquired facility in handling the wheelchair she had designed, and rolled it easily from place to place. He sat with the others on the terrace, and went with them almost everywhere else, not only to the stables but also to the orchards and woods. He looked well, he was very cheerful, and his attitude towards his wife was one of unabashed attachment. He took her hand and held it in his whenever she sat down beside him, and frequently he put his arms up and drew her face to his, kissing her ardently. Veronique, having caught Zoe's eyes upon them during one of these fond interludes, spoke to her about it the first time the two girls were alone together.

"I saw you looking at us this evening, Zoe. I hope you don't mind seeing us make love to each other that way. It's the only way we can. It isn't as if we were like you and Bob, with everything before us. I suppose, subconsciously, Welby's thinking of that, and so he's even more demonstrative than usual. He's trying to show that he's satisfied with what he's got. He's daring you to think that

you have, or that you're going to have, any more than he has. I never saw such courage, did you?"

"He is brave. But I wouldn't call you a coward either, Ronnie."

"Well, I have some bad moments, but I hope Welby doesn't guess that. He's grown so intuitive I can't be sure; I put up as good a bluff as I can though. And it isn't as hard, in some ways, as it was at first, because Welby's so much more hopeful. While that dreadful depression lasted, it was simply terrible. I used to lock myself up in an empty room, while he was asleep, and pace back and forth, and grind my teeth, so that it wouldn't get me down, too. Now my only fear is that he's too hopeful. Doctor Foster says it's often so with such cases. First the patients sink into melancholia, and then they climb out of it into a state of blind unreasoning cheerfulness. Welby's sure now that he's going to walk again someday. He's sure of more than that. He's sure that someday we're going to be reunited."

"Yes. Somehow I gathered that. It's heartrending, isn't it?"

"One way you look at it, of course it is. But another—— You know, Zoe, the first thing he did, consciously, was to try to turn to me, as if I'd been beside him. And when he found he couldn't—— well, that *was* heartrending. I tried to think of something to say that would comfort him, at least a little. So I told him he mustn't move just then, because it would hurt him, but that a hunting accident didn't amount to anything, that someday he would turn to me again, and that meanwhile it wasn't necessary, because I'd always be close to him, anyway. I guess I succeeded in reassuring him. Because, since he began to grow better, he's kept trying to turn to me——literally, I mean. And every time he fails he takes hold of my hand, and thanks me for standing by the way I promised, and tells me not to get tired waiting or to take it too hard, because by and by——"

"Oh, Ronnie——"

"And, of course, it is hard. Not just because it's pitiful to see him so helpless. But because I want him so. Because I think I'll go crazy sometimes if I don't have him. I still lock myself up in an empty room once in a while, Zoe, and pace the floor, until I'm tired out. If I didn't—— It's dreadful what unfulfilled desire does to us, isn't it? And this seems such a waste. It ought not to be constantly seeking. It ought to be constantly satisfied. I ought to have another baby on the way by now. I wish to God I had!"

She sobbed suddenly, burying her face in her hands. Then she looked up, quickly, shaking her hair with a gesture of defiance.

"Anyway, I've got one," she said exultantly. "That's more than lots of women have, or know enough to want. Bennie's a beautiful baby, isn't he, Zoe? And so strong. Doctor Foster says he's never seen a finer specimen. I'm trying hard to plan so that he'll have everything he needs—a good home and a good education and all

that. I'm not thinking only of Welby any more, I'm thinking of Bennie, too. I've got hold of Candace's share in Hunter's Green for him, by surrendering the rights he and Welby and I had to the Washington property. Welby agreed with me that it would be a good idea, and I've managed to pay off the mortgage on this place. I couldn't stand the suspense of thinking that the bank might clamp down on me any day, so I sold something I had, something that was my very own, and got a lot of money. But not enough to keep on paying taxes and insurance and wages and all the rest of the overhead. It's immense on a place like this, and the worst of it is, the place doesn't bring in anything in return. I think that by and by it may, if the apple market ever gets back to normal, and if I can learn to run a stock farm. But that'll take time, and it'll be over a year yet before I get my own money. So I thought, if there were anything you could use, in the stories about this place, that might be another string to my bow, and to yours, too. I've jotted down what I thought would be interesting for you to see—you understand, don't you, Zoe, that I wouldn't want you to pretend anything was good, unless it really was?"

"I understand, Ronnie. I won't, unless it really is."

Zoe read the scribbled notes before she and Bob started back to Washington, and she was able to assure Ronnie that there was good stuff there, though personally she was not sure how it would be best to use it. She promised to think the whole thing over, and try to find an advantageous approach to an editor who might be receptive to material of that sort. Later on, she also talked the matter over with Bob, for she was increasingly impressed both with his sound judgment about reader response, and his sympathetic understanding to regard to more general problems. In his turn, Bob promised to think the matter over, too. But much as he had come to admire Veronique, and ready as he was, on general principles, to do anything he could to help her, his preoccupation was increasingly with Zoe, and this had now taken a new turn. He had thought that she looked very white and very thin, even for her, ever since her return from Europe; but it was not until he had seen her pallor contrasted with Ronnie's blooming beauty that he had begun to worry about it. What was more, Ronnie herself had spoken to him on the subject.

"Bob, Zoe looks fearfully overstrained. Why don't you marry her and take care of her?"

"Why don't I? Good God, I haven't tried to do anything else but that. You don't know what Zoe's like though. Even if I could knock her down and drag her in a senseless state before a Justice of the Peace, I couldn't make her say 'I do' when she came to again. If you knew all I'd been up against, you'd think I'd done pretty well to get a ring on her finger and wrest a promise from her that she'd announce the engagement sometime this fall."

"Maybe Welby used the best method after all," Veronique re-

marked thoughtfully, and quite without embarrassment. It took Bob a moment to recover from his stupefaction sufficiently to answer.

"Maybe, with you. But if you don't mind my saying so, Ronnie, at this late date, you were out looking for trouble. You were so wide awake yourself, emotionally, that you couldn't help being provocative, and you couldn't help inviting the results of provocation either. You had them coming to you."

"Of course I know that," Veronique answered, still calmly. "I couldn't have analyzed it all, a year and a half ago, but everything you say is true enough. And as you've probably gathered, I'm very glad I got what was coming to me. But what makes you think Zoe wouldn't be too?"

"I don't know that I'm ready to tell all in a large way like you, Ronnie. You'll have to take my word for it that I know she'd turn from me with horror if I even tried to do what Welby did. If I succeeded, she'd probably kill me. No, I don't mean probably. I know she would. Besides, I don't want to do that."

"You don't *want* to do that?"

"Oh hell! You know I mean I want to *marry* her first."

"Well, Welby wanted to marry me first. His intentions were honourable enough. But he got tired of arguing with me about it. However, I see your point. Zoe's a voluntary virgin and I was an involuntary one. But if you can't get her into your bedroom, I think you'd better get her into a doctor's office. She'll either snap suddenly or waste away entirely if you don't. She's a bundle of beautifully controlled nerves that'll suddenly burst in an explosion. She's done the work of a dozen women for years and——"

"You're doing the work of a dozen women yourself, Ronnie."

"That's different. I didn't when I was a growing girl, the way she did. And I weigh about twenty pounds more than she does. I haven't used up my reserves like she has. And now I'm outdoors a lot, and I eat like a horse and sleep like a log—that is, generally. Zoe's not only overtaxed her strength; she's been hungry and cold and neglected and abused. Now success has come to her with a sudden rush, but there's been some sort of an upheaval along with that, too, if I'm not terribly mistaken, that's taken the lungs and liver right out of her. I bet you'd find out, if you took the trouble to look into it, that she doesn't sleep more than two or three hours a night, and that she never eats a square meal when she's alone. Don't let her crack up, Bob. If you can't help her, see to it that somebody else does. And be awfully good to her, won't you?"

Because of this conversation, which he did not succeed in dismissing from his mind, Bob tried to switch the topic of his next private talk with Zoe from a discussion of Veronique's financial problems to a consideration of her own physical condition. Zoe regarded him shrewdly and a little scornfully.

"You never thought that up yourself, Bob. Ronnie put that into your head. She's crazy on doing deeds of that kind. I like her a lot, but I wish to Heaven she'd let other people alone. It was she who gave Helen the idea of going to Mexico, and now the poor kid won't rest until she gets there. And unless I'm awfully mistaken, it was she who started Isabel Windsor running amuck. Not that she meant to. But the result was just the same and it's done a lot of damage. She's crazy on the subject of babies, too. She thinks every woman ought to have about a dozen, by fair means or foul."

"She didn't say anything about babies to me," Bob remarked, rather uncomfortably. His discomfiture was not caused by any embarrassment, roused by babies, actual or potential, but by the mention of Isabel, which in turn suggested Giles to his mind. He was tired of having so many topics unexpectedly revert to Giles. "If she had, I'd have told her like a shot that you don't want any and that I don't care whether you have any or not—in fact, that I'd rather you didn't, for a long time, anyway, because I want you all to myself," he went on, a little awkwardly, "but I do think it would be a good plan for you to see a doctor. I don't mean about that. But he might give you a tonic or something."

"Sulphur and molasses? This isn't spring, it's fall, and the remedy's out of date, anyhow. Some of your remarks do date you, Bob. Try to be a modern young man and come out of the sticks. Pretty soon it'll be egg-nog time, and I'll fatten up on that. As for those other pointers you so delicately suggest, while denying it, I don't need to see a doctor, thanks. I know all the answers already."

It was impossible to make her talk seriously about anything at the moment, and Bob finally gave up the attempt and bantered her in return. But the next evening when he went to see her he heartily wished that he had been more insistent; for when Pearl Gray opened the door for him, she did not take his hat in a respectful and retiring manner; she gave the impression that she had been lying in wait to spring out at him with evil tidings. Her eyes were bulging and her black skin had assumed the peculiar hue which, in negroes, corresponds to pallor in whites.

"Marse Bob, Ah's glad to see you, Ah sho' is. Miss Zoe, she done come in about an hour ago, an' Ah thought the moment Ah seed her that she looked powerful peaked. She started telling me about some kind of liquor she wanted Ah should fix for you, and she hadn't more than got out four words when she swooned away. Yes, suh. Right on my clean kitchen floor. Ah done got her to bed now, but——"

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"No, suh. She wouldn't let me. When she come to, she said she was goin' to get up thisawhile and have dinner with you. Ah done told her she mustn't exalt herself, and Ah noticed she ain't stirred

in her bed hardly yet. Ah'd feel a lot easier if a doctor did see her, Ah sho' would, Marse Bob."

"So would I," Bob answered grimly, sitting down at the telephone.

He detested his mother's medical attendant, a "fashionable physician" whose manner seemed to him more suave than sincere, and whom he had more than once heard telling tales out of school; but the man was undeniably able and brilliant, and offhand Bob could not think of anyone else to call. Doctor Dinsmore was at dinner, he could not be disturbed at the moment except for an emergency, Bob was informed by someone whom he took for a well-trained but heartless hireling. He answered scornfully and peremptorily, and presently Doctor Dinsmore himself called back. He was so sorry that Mr. Morton had not been put through to him immediately, he said in his smooth voice; of course, it was the servant's mistake. He was distressed to know that Miss Wing was not feeling well and he would come to see her at once. Meanwhile, if there were any aromatic ammonia in the apartment, he would suggest that Mr. Morton give her ten drops in a little cool water without delay.

Bob went into the bathroom and rummaged, unceremoniously and unsuccessfully. He found bath salts, dusting powder and toilet water, all delicately scented with lavender, plain cold cream, plain toothpaste, and a neat stack of soap in flowered wrappers, but no medicine of any kind or description. Apparently Zoe was not in the habit of fainting or given to dosing herself. He knocked on the bedroom door, and in response to a rather faint "Come in," entered, and, walking over to the bed, looked anxiously down at her.

It was a big bed, one of the treasures she had acquired in the course of her travels, and she looked almost lost in the centre of it. He had never thought of her before as being small and stricken; her habitual self-reliance made her appear to take on size and strength. Now he saw both her slimness and her pallor accentuated not only by her condition but by her surroundings. His heart seemed to turn over in his breast as he looked at her, and everything he tried to say was inadequate and uninspired.

"I'm sorry you've had this spill, Zoe. I can't seem to find anything to give you. But I've telephoned Doctor Dinsmore. He'll be here in a minute."

Zoe stirred a little, and smiled faintly but mockingly. "That tattletale hand-kisser!" she murmured with contempt. "What on earth did you want him around for?"

"Well, I couldn't think of anyone else. I'm not sold on him myself. But you had to have somebody."

"No, I didn't. It's been an awfully hot day. And I'm a little short of sleep. But I'd have been all right in the morning without anyone."

"Why, it's been the coolest day we've had since June! And you slept till noon at Hunter's Green!"

"I stayed in bed till noon. The two aren't necessarily synonymous. And I felt hot, anyway. I'm disgusted with myself for toppling over like this—just like Isabel! Perhaps it serves me right for being so caustic and sceptical about her. But don't let's argue, Bob. I don't feel like it just now."

"Of course you don't, you poor kid. Just lie still and snooze, if you can. You don't mind if I sit here beside you, do you?"

"Of course not. I'd be glad to have you."

She smiled again, without mockery this time, and, turning over, reached for his hand and placed it against her face. Then she held it there, cradled between her own, and once or twice she kissed it. Bob was more moved than he dared to betray. He sat very still, fearful lest any special show of emotion would upset her, but infinitely touched because she had so spontaneously caressed him. He was still sitting beside her when Pearl Gray announced the arrival of Doctor Dinsmore, and Zoe, releasing his hand with a last little squeeze, seemed to take it for granted that he would remain nearby.

"Don't go," she said softly. "I like to have you here. And I really don't think much of this plush tomcat you've sent for—Oh, hello, Doctor Dinsmore. Sorry Bob interrupted your dinner. There isn't a thing on earth the matter with me."

Doctor Dinsmore, who was dressed in impeccable dinner-clothes and whose manner was as sleek as his hair, said, sympathetically, that they would soon see; and Bob, turning tactfully to the other side of the room, told himself with impatience that he was a fool to feel as he did about having a physician, for whom he himself had sent, make a superficial examination which was obviously indicated. The fact remained, however, that it upset him more than it did Zoe. He was afraid that she might be hurt or alarmed, and he could not quell his unreasonable resentment against the amount of peering and prying that Doctor Dinsmore seemed to think was necessary or at least desirable. He was infinitely relieved when a little pause indicated that the doctor had asked his last question, and a slight swish sounded as if Zoe's nightgown was where it belonged again and that the sheets were drawn smoothly over her.

"Well," Doctor Dinsmore said unctuously—"well, I think that as soon as Miss Wing feels able to submit to them she should have all the regulation tests—blood, heart, metabolism and so on. I will make all the necessary arrangements in due course. I do not want to run the slightest risk of upsetting her this evening, so I cannot be sure how serious the present disturbance may be. But I am inclined to look on the bright side, Mr. Morton. I think I am safe in saying that it is wholly functional, that there is no organic involvement. I am afraid that she is a little anæmic and evidently

she insists on working too hard. These modern young ladies, Mr. Morton! You know how they persist in living on their nerves!"

"We have a curious predilection for eating," Zoe murmured dryly, "and most of us modern ones can't do that unless we earn our bread and butter. Sometimes that takes quite a lot of nerve. Haven't you found that out yourself, Doctor Dinsmore?"

"Always playful, always playful!" Doctor Dinsmore answered waggishly, as if he were willing to humour Zoe by joking himself. "But we mustn't permit ourselves to do too much laughing tonight. I am just going to call up Tschiffely's and order a mild sedative for tonight. Nothing at all unpleasant to take. I'm hopeful it will give you a good night's rest. You may repeat the first dose after an hour if you're not drowsy by that time. Does your maid usually sleep in, Miss Wing? No? Well, then, you should persuade her to stay by the usual method, so efficacious with her race. I don't think you really need a nurse, though I'll send for one if you like. Or perhaps you're planning to stay, Mr. Morton?"

"No, I wasn't planning to stay," Bob answered with extreme curtness.

"That's another strange predilection of mine," Zoe murmured, still more dryly than she had spoken before. "When I tell a young man I'd like to have him dine with me, that's really all I expect him to do. And all he expects to do. So Mr. Morton's had a very disappointing evening, Doctor Dinsmore. Because he hasn't had any dinner, so far. But I'm sure Pearl Gray will give it to him as soon as you've gone. And I know she'll gladly stay here, without any special inducement. Ask Pearl to open the door for the doctor, Bob. I'm distressed to think how long we've detained him. I believe he hadn't eaten his dinner, either."

"I can't bear having my pretty little patients distressed. So I will go now if you insist, Miss Wing. But I'll drop in sometime late tomorrow. Unless you send for me beforehand. And I can count on your promise that you won't get up in the meanwhile, can't I?"

"It looks now as if you could. I won't try to walk around until the ceiling stops coming down to meet me. But you can count on not being called before you get around to coming, too."

The doctor shook his finger at her, even more playfully than he had spoken, and then waved a gallant good-bye. Zoe watched him depart under lids that still drooped mournfully. But when the front door clicked after him she reached for Bob's hand again and laughed outright.

"Well, you certainly did me a good turn," she said. "That man's the best copy I've found since I met Mussolini. But I wouldn't call him in to see Helen, if I were you, or any other little ewe lamb like her. Mrs. Endicott sent for him last summer when Ronnie began to lose her breakfast. The old girl didn't have an inkling of what the matter was, but of course Dinsmore guessed right off the bat. He

got Grandma away from the room by saying he'd require perfect quiet to see how one of those nice mild sedatives he gives would work; and the minute she was out of hearing he put his arm around Ronnie and whispered sympathetically that he couldn't do anything for her himself, because he might get caught, but that he would arrange to have her sent to a lovely suburban sanitarium for a 'rest cure' and that everything would be all right. Ronnie shook him off and slapped his face and socked him in the eye, and what she called him before she got through completely eclipsed anything I ever said. He was so sore he started to spread the news, but Welby spiked his guns, so to speak, by going to his office with a real one. He did tell Helen, though, before Welby shut him up. She only half understood what it was all about, so she asked me to explain—— I'm sure he's terribly disappointed to find that mere fatigue is the prosaic cause of my fainting fit—— Well, run along, Bob, and get your dinner. Then, if it wouldn't bore you, I'd love to have you come back and sit here beside me until I go to sleep. I do like having you around. And I love you a lot. Maybe you didn't know."

Long after she had gone to sleep he sat watching her, his heart filled with thankfulness. He tried to reproach himself because his concern over her illness and his disgust with Dinsmore had been swallowed up in his joy over her instinctive appeal to him. Little by little he was winning her over. This certainty crowded out every other sensation. Slowly but surely she was learning to love him. It was only a matter of time before she would be wholly his. He did not telephone her the next day because he was afraid that he might disturb her when she was resting. But she called him up about noon, and he learned that Doctor Dinsmore had been less considerate. The doctor had telephoned about ten, Zoe told Bob, while she was still asleep; but, after all, it did not matter much, because she had dozed straight off again. She had slept and slept. She needed sleep, that was really all that ailed her, just as she had told him in the beginning. The office had been wonderful. She had talked with Mr. Ruthven, too, and he had told her that there wasn't a single thing for her to do there, that the town was as dead as a door-nail. He thought maybe the *Examiner* might push her vacation ahead a few weeks unless something broke. Well, she would be looking for Bob around seven-thirty. She thought she could stagger as far as the dining-room by that time. If not, Pearl Gray was going to bring in a little table and set it up by her bed. So they would have their supper together this time in any case. Yes, she still loved him a lot. Well, they would talk about that later. But he was such a swell guy she thought perhaps——

Bob hung up the receiver in such a glow that he had hard work turning back to routine correspondence with complaining con-

stituents. And Zoe was also very happy. She lay in her bed, contented and still, without worrying about her work or anything else, dozing off and on, and occasionally glancing at the clock but scarcely noting the flight of time until she began to tell herself that presently Bob would be back. When Doctor Dinsmore came she was surprised to see him. She had actually forgotten all about him.

Unimpeded by Bob's restraining presence, he made a more thorough examination of her than he had done the day before. Zoe accepted it as a matter of course. She felt no impatience because his stay was prolonged, but eventually she began to feel that his procrastination was deliberate. He seemed to be lingering indefinitely. As if he had divined her suspicions he laughed lightly and sat down.

"Just a few minutes more, Miss Wing. I want to listen to your heart again. I don't need to tell you that it's better not to have any fabric between the instrument and the skin. So if you're not cold, as you are——"

"No, I'm not cold; but I do think a little of this sort of thing goes a long way."

"Just let me spread out the sheet. That's better, isn't it? I hope you weren't annoyed with me because I was later this afternoon than I said I would be."

"No, I wasn't annoyed at that——"

"You're very charitable, Miss Wing. Very charitable and understanding. Just rest quietly. I want you to be perfectly relaxed before I go on examining you. I'll try to distract you by talking to you. Then I can watch you and see when it will be wise to continue. Of course I wasn't late intentionally. Something quite extraordinary happened to detain me."

"Really?" inquired Zoe, still coolly.

"Yes. I was called upon to attend the wife of a Cabinet officer. It was very shocking."

"Is she dangerously ill?"

"She wasn't ill at all. And she's resting comfortably now. Her family physician is with her. I was called in merely because I happened to be in the building when her sad state was discovered, but of course I left as soon as I saw her safely into her own doctor's hands. As a matter of professional etiquette. I am sure you know all about that in your own work."

"But what was the matter with her?"

"She had attempted to commit suicide. Because of her husband's misdemeanours. Such a happy marriage as theirs appears to be, too. But, then, appearances are often deceitful, aren't they, Miss Wing? Now I should have thought from seeing you casually, here and there, that you were a very cool, level-headed young woman, attractive, of course, but slightly lacking perhaps in emotional capacity. Now that I have had the privilege, however, of coming to see you

as your physician, I realize my great mistake. I can see you were only unawakened, only awaiting the magic touch of a teacher. A pedagogue in passion, so to speak. Ah, I have coined a quaint phrase, have I not? But the phrase is unimportant. However, it is my great hope that you will find this teacher very soon. Now, if you are rested, Miss Wing, I should like to continue my examination."

His hand was already moving from her shoulder to her breast. Zoe gave a slight exclamation. The doctor spoke soothingly.

"I didn't mean to startle you. It's important for you to keep quiet."

"You didn't startle me. I'm very much interested in your story."

"Ah, my story! I suppose I shouldn't have told it. I have the greatest horror of being indiscreet. And this is not the moment for you to become excited. If you will just relax again, my dear little patient, and permit me to proceed. We were getting on so beautifully before you became distracted. I shall blame myself for ever if this interruption is disastrous."

The interruption had indeed been disastrous, as far as Doctor Dinsmore was concerned. Zoe had not even heard his final remarks. She had suddenly ceased to be a sick woman and had become an alert reporter. She sat up in bed, oblivious alike of her head, which was still swimming, and of the lacking "obstructive fabrics," which were still lying in a little heap on the bed beside her.

"Would you mind coming back tomorrow to do that?" she inquired. Her voice was suddenly vibrant, and the doctor recognized its quality without realizing the reason for it. "I'd rather you didn't go on with your examination today. But I'd like to see you again very much."

"Of course, of course, you lovely little deceiver! I really ought to go back to some of the dear, dull ladies who are waiting for me now in any case. But I will return tomorrow at this same hour, if that would be pleasing to you. Unless, of course, there is another attempted suicide in high official circles. If that should happen I know I could count on you to forgive the delay, as you did this time."

Again he waved his hand playfully as he took his departure. Zoe was reaching for the telephone almost before the door clicked behind him. She was tense with fear lest Mr. Ruthven might have left his office early, lest she might not be able to reach him. But almost instantly his gruff voice sounded reassuringly over the wire. She cut his curt greeting short.

"Zoe speaking. I've had a tip. A Cabinet officer's wife has attempted suicide."

"My God! Do you know which one? Or how? Or where?"

"No, but I'm off to find out. Wait for a call. I'll phone back. Save space."

She jumped into a dress, stepped into shoes, and snatched up a hat and a handbag. Her head was reeling, her stomach completely empty. But she knew she must trust to luck to see her through her scoop, no matter how quickly she collapsed afterwards. She called to Pearl Gray from the doorway, but she could not stop to answer either the protests or the questions of the horrified maid; she was already mentally reviewing the habitats of the respective Cabinet officers. A cruising taxi slowed up obligingly as she pelted down the steps, and she leapt into it.

"The Willard," she said tensely. "And make it snappy. This is a case of life or death. Never mind about the tariff. I'll give you a dollar if we're there in three minutes."

The taxi driver had a large and hungry family and he was skilled in circumventing the law. Zoe reached her initial destination in less time than she had reckoned possible. Otherwise the results of her first mad dash were disappointing. She had no trouble at all in penetrating to the quarters of the two distinguished officials who lived at the Willard, both of whom knew her well and liked her immensely. In one case a beaming maid, whom she had often over-tipped, told her that Mr. and Mrs. Snow had just stepped out to see a friend from their home town whose room was right down the corridor, but that if she would wait for a few moments they would certainly be back and certainly be glad to see her. She told Hilda that she would do an errand or two herself and return. Then she hurried on. In the next case she found both the suspected dignitary and his devoted spouse at home in a state of amiable idleness and was cordially invited to join them in an aperitif. She got part of it down, asking adroit questions while she did so; but both Mr. and Mrs. White were obviously and guilelessly unaware of domestic trouble anywhere in the President's official family. Their suite was on the eighth floor, and when she finally escaped from them and their well-meaning efforts to persuade her to stay for dinner, she found the elevator service had apparently been suspended, as far as that floor was concerned. She rang three times, and three times watched the hand on the clocklike indicator swing up to seven and then go back to one. At that point she could bear it no longer. She rushed to the stairway, flew down it, and flung herself into a telephone booth.

"Nothing doing at the Willard. I'm starting uptown. No use going to the Carlton, though. Nesbit lives there, but he's a bachelor."

"Yeah. Keep going, Zoe."

Ruthven had completely forgotten that she had been ill and so had she. Her mind was so full of her scoop by this time that she was not even aware that the swaying sensation which bothered her slightly in the next taxi had its source in her own dizziness. She told the driver to wait when she got in front of an imposing resi-

dence, crossed the sidewalk giddily, and rang the bell. There was no answer, and above the bars of the basement entrance all the windows were shuttered. She remembered tardily that the Secretary of State and Mrs. Standish were still in Europe, and that in any case Doctor Dinsmore would not have spoken about being "in the building" if he had gone to a private house. She hurried back to her taxi, giving another address, and the driver looked at her with curiosity.

"You haven't taken one too many, have you?" he inquired solicitously.

"No, I only took half a one. I've been sick. That's why I'm a little unsteady on my feet. But I'm all right. Go on. And hurry up about it."

The Majestic was her next objective. It had long been dubbed a "senatorial beehive," but it had never been especially popular with Cabinet members, and only one lived there, as against three at the Wardman Park, which she still had to reach if she were thwarted again. But it seemed better not to detour or to double on her tracks, because that in itself would involve so much loss of time. She hardly knew the Harrises, who lived at the Majestic, but on the other hand she knew both the girls at the switchboard and the clerks in the front office well by this time. She approached the desk with feet that faltered in spite of her, but with a confident smile.

"Good evening. I wonder if you have an extra key to Senator Morton's apartment that you could lend me? I'm meeting him and Bob Morton here for dinner, and I seem to be a little early. I'd like to get in there and freshen up if I could."

"Why, certainly, Miss Wing. Senator and Mrs. Morton have both told me that any time you came here——"

She took the key nonchalantly, nodding her pleasant thanks. But she slipped it into her handbag before she reached the elevator. There were no other passengers. She asked the operator a daring question in a careless way.

"Which floor is Secretary Harris's apartment on? I forgot to ask at the office."

The operator stared at her impassively, without starting the car. "There isn't anyone at Secretary Harris's apartment," he said mechanically. "They're all in the country. The clerk ought to have told you that at the office, lady."

"Get this car going and don't lie to me. I'm a nurse. I'm needed and I'm needed quick."

The elevator shot upwards, while the man began to mumble apologetically. "Excuse me, lady. But we've got our orders, you know. Terrible, isn't it? Took an overdose of something. Doctor Spring's there and one nurse already. And they had to send for you, too? Well, Mrs. Harris sure must be bad. Here you are, lady—615, right down this side on the left."

She was there, in sight of it. She was ringing the bell. Her head was ringing, too, and that queer feeling of floating away in the air was getting rapidly worse. But she would not need to hold on for more than a minute or two now. The door flew open in her face, and a frightened-looking servant confronted her.

"I'm the extra nurse. Will you please tell Doctor Spring I'm here?"

"Yes, miss. Just a minute. Would you mind sitting down in the hall? Everything's that upset——"

Zoe sat down gratefully. The plan of the apartment was exactly like the Mortons'; she knew, instantly, where all the different rooms were located, and as she waited she began to reconstruct the entire scene in her head. It was not long before another door opened, and a woman who was obviously a real nurse approached her.

"Doctor Spring says there must be some mistake. He hasn't sent for another nurse since he sent for me."

"Oh—— Well, they must have misunderstood at the Registry. Perhaps the operator on duty didn't realize you'd started, if there was a shift there. The patient's doing all right then?"

"Yes, she's resting very comfortably now. But things did look bad for an hour."

"Was it veronal?"

"Yes, fifty grains. It's been touch and go, I can tell you."

"You're sure you wouldn't like to have me stay, now I'm here? You look tired, and I'd be glad to help."

"No, I'm all right. You look tired yourself. Are you just off another case?"

"Yes, this morning. Double pneumonia. The patient died, too. That always makes it worse."

"Yes, that's so. But it's the way things go. Well, I'm glad to have seen you, Miss——"

"Jones. I'm glad to have seen you, too. I don't think we've ever met before."

Zoe smiled, shook hands, and, opening the front door, let herself quietly out. Then, for the second time that afternoon, she dashed down a long stairway. She had no intention of facing the elevator man again until a reasonable time had elapsed, and she was making hard for the Mortons' apartment. There was a private wire there, one that did not go through the hotel switchboard. She knew she had to reach it before the floating feeling carried her away entirely.

Somehow she made her last flight. Somehow she turned her last corner. As she flew along she fumbled for her magic key. The catch of her handbag was caught, and still hurrying ahead, blindly now, she tried impatiently to wrench it open. When it parted, suddenly, it disgorged its entire contents over the carpet, and as she stooped to pick it up she collided with someone coming from the opposite direction. She snatched at the key, without trying to rescue

anything else, without apologizing and without even trying to see whom she had hit. Then an arm shot out suddenly and she was seized and imprisoned.

"Zoe!" her captor cried. "Why, Zoe! Why, darling! You didn't think you could run away from me like that, did you?"

There was only one voice in all the world with such a ring to it. Even in her desperate state Zoe recognized it instantly. With a beating heart she looked up into Giles Arnold's face.

CHAPTER XVI

"ZOE, you certainly are unique. I'm sure there's not another girl in the world who would greet a long-lost lover by crying out, 'Let me go, I've got to get to a telephone!'"

"I had something a good deal more important to say to Bill Ruthven at that moment than I had to say to you. And if you don't mind my telling you so, Giles, I think you're verging on the unique yourself, when you talk about a long-lost lover. Unless my memory's playing me tricks, I told you the last time I saw you that you didn't mean a thing on earth to me."

"I know you did. But I didn't believe you then and I wouldn't believe you now if you repeated it."

"I do repeat it and you'd better believe me. It will save us both a lot of time and trouble if you do. I'm glad to see you and I'd be interested in hearing how you happen to be here. But when you've told me that I'll have to be cruising along. I've got a date for this evening and not an awful lot of spare time."

Her voice was cool enough and so was her manner. There was nothing about either to give Giles the least encouragement. But as he glanced at her across the little table where they sat drinking champagne, in a bare living room that had been meticulously dismantled and shrouded for the summer, he was still sustained by the thought of the look on her face when she had first recognized him, before she had time to mask the joy that flooded it. She had indeed been glad to see him—so glad that despite the greeting of which he complained, she had betrayed her happiness both by that illumined expression and by her unprotesting readiness to remain with him. Having been assured that there was a private wire in the flat where he was staying, so that her message would not have to go through the hotel switchboard, she had consented without objection to sending her message from the apartment in question, instead of from Senator Morton's, which Giles learned for the first time was next door. Giles, in his turn, had briefly explained that the diggings where he had taken refuge belonged to a friend who was out of town, but to whom his inimitable cook, Virgie, had gone when he himself left for Paris; the friend had kindly suggested that since he could not immediately or conveniently occupy his own closed house, he should bestow himself under Virgie's care in the apartment instead. The suggestion had seemed to him sound, and he had acted upon it. He was therefore prepared to offer his usual brand of hospitality, or something reasonably close to it. What would Zoe have, while they caught up on each other's news?

The little table was set and the champagne was standing in a cooler beside it by the time she had finished telephoning. Giles inevitably overheard enough fragments of what she was saying to have a general idea of her latest activities before she joined him, and she told him the details while she sipped her champagne. A little colour crept into her white face while she talked. He had not failed to observe her extreme pallor, and as soon as he could do so tactfully he asked her whether she were feeling well. It was then that she confessed she had risen from bed to secure her story, and that he called her unique for the first time—no one else in the world would have been able to pursue and piece together a clue in such record time under such adverse circumstances, he said. After that, he made the second remark, including his designation of himself as a long-lost lover, which he immediately realized was unfortunate. His next step was to ask a question instead of answering one.

"Did you ever hear of a 'shanghai post,' Zoe?"

"You mean China duty? Why, you had that just before Washington! I thought you were fixed in Paris for the next two years!"

"I thought so, too. But I was mistaken. And I wasn't talking about China duty. A 'shanghai post,' in the lingo of the Navy, is any kind that's used as a penalty."

"Are you trying to tell me you're being penalized for something?"

"Yes, Zoe. I got here late last night in response to a summons. I'm back in Washington to report to the Navy Department. Everyone has to do that, you know, before going on to a new post after diplomatic duty. I'll probably be here two or three weeks. I doubt if it's any more. That's the reason I didn't think it was worthwhile to open my house, when I could stay here so easily. After that, Heaven knows where I'll be. Guantanamo probably, or some such place."

"Guantanamo? I don't even know where it is!"

"It's the American Naval station in Cuba, near Santiago, across the island from Havana. There's not much of anything there except water and sand."

"But, Giles, they couldn't send you to a place like that!"

"Oh yes they could! What's more, I haven't a doubt that they will. Haven't you ever heard that the way of a transgressor is hard?"

"I must be dumb or something. You don't mean to tell me that someone found out about your little slip at Deauville and that just for that——"

"Remember that 'just for that' you wouldn't marry me, Zoe. Why shouldn't the Ambassador take it hard, if you did?"

"But how did the Ambassador ever find out about it?"

"I had a bad break. You see, I told him I'd be at the Royal in Deauville. I did register there. But, as you know, I didn't stay

there much. Something unexpected came up at the office and he tried to telephone me. When he was told I was out he left a message. I didn't get it until the next day."

Zoe gave a smothered exclamation. Giles saw that she had stopped sipping her champagne and that her cigarette had gone out.

"He was very decent about it. I've got to hand it to him. He didn't do what lots of men would have done in his place—that is, simply dispatch a message to the Department saying he'd like to have me recalled. He sent for me and had a talk with me. He said he'd heard a certain amount of gossip, but that he'd never paid much attention to it, took it for granted the lovely Mrs. Windsor and I were old friends and that I enjoyed an old friend's privileges, but that my main interest was in you. He added some very complimentary remarks about you, Zoe—told me he thought you were a fine girl, that you'd be a credit to the Service as an officer's wife and so on. Of course, I had to lie like a gentleman about Isabel, but I think the old boy believed I was telling the truth. I did tell the truth about you, and I said I was all cut up because you'd gone away. So then he remarked he was very sorry, that he realized I'd had a bad blow, and that we'd just forget about the misleading incident at Deauville. He told me he was sure he could trust me not to do anything again that would give a false impression."

There was a long silence. It was Zoe who broke it, speaking now with an effort which she could not conceal.

"So his confidence was misplaced, was it?"

"No, it wasn't. Not really. I am telling you the truth, Zoe, you must believe me. I did go down to Deauville again, but only to talk to Isabel. That's all I intended to do and it's all I did do. I didn't stay overnight. I asked her again to divorce Stephen Windsor and marry me. The more I thought it over, the more I felt I had to do that, considering—considering everything."

"And she didn't accept you?"

"At first she temporized. She said there was no hurry, that we could discuss marriage in the course of the summer. Then I told her that unless she would promise to marry me, I wouldn't go down to Deauville again. So after that she said she would. But she made me promise not to tell anyone that she had. She said it would put her in a very bad light."

"But she didn't worry about putting you in a bad light."

"No. I don't believe she thought of that, Zoe."

"She wouldn't. Isabel Windsor never thought of but one person in her whole life, and that's herself. I suppose the next crisis came when the Ambassador heard you'd been back to Deauville not only once but twice, and that he didn't send for you a second time to give you a chance to explain that your visits had been purely conversational—very pure and very conversational?"

"That was it exactly. He communicated direct with Washing-

ton, and I got my orders to leave Paris. I can't pretend they weren't a good deal of a shock. So I asked Isabel to release me from my pledge of silence, to let me explain our plans. Not that it would have made any difference then in the results, but the good old Chief had been so decent to me that I wanted him to know I'd appreciated it, that I hadn't really let him down."

"And she wouldn't?"

"No. When she heard about the recall, she said she'd begun to realize she'd made a great mistake. She didn't feel she could divorce Stephen after all. But she hoped I'd realize how much I meant to her just the same. She said she'd gladly come back on the same boat with me. And she took it for granted that while I was getting ready to leave I'd commute back and forth between Deauville and Paris all the time, since it didn't matter what the stuffy old Ambassador thought any more."

"In other words, she was still perfectly willing to be your fancy lady, but her conscience began to trouble her about marrying you as soon as she found out that if she did that, she'd have to live in Guantanamo, or some such place, instead of Paris?"

"Zoe, you put things in a terribly bald way."

"Well, that's the way they were, weren't they?"

"I'm afraid so. Something like that. But don't be too hard on her, Zoe. How could a woman like Isabel be happy in a place like Guantanamo?"

"If she loved you, she'd be happy with you anywhere."

"Is that the way you'd feel about it, Zoe?"

"Of course."

"Would you be prepared to prove that to me?"

Again Zoe gave a smothered exclamation. Giles leaned across the table and took her hands in his.

"Please, Zoe," he said urgently. "Please listen to me this one time more. I haven't forgotten anything you said to me when we parted in Paris. You were terribly angry and terribly hurt, and you had a right to be. You thought you were telling the truth, too, when you said you didn't love me any more, that Isabel had killed your love with her own hands. But you weren't. You loved me then and you love me now. I dare you to look at me and say that you don't."

"I don't."

"Say it again, Zoe. You didn't look at me that time."

Instead of looking at him, Zoe tried to draw her hands away. They were firmly imprisoned. She did not continue her attempt to free them, but she spoke urgently in her turn.

"I think you'd better listen to me for a while. You say you haven't forgotten anything I told you in Paris, but I'm afraid your memory isn't as good as you claim. Otherwise you might remember some slight mention of Bob Morton in our final talk."

"Of course I remember it. I took it pretty seriously then, too. But I don't take it nearly so seriously now."

"Why not?"

"Because you haven't married him after all."

"I'm going to. I'm engaged to him."

"Officially?"

"Yes. His parents have bestowed a very adequate blessing on us. All our friends are very much pleased. I'm wearing a ring he gave me. You're digging it into my hand right now, so that it hurts."

"Of course I noticed the ring right away. And I have no doubt that it hurts. But I'm inclined to think it did that long before I took hold of your hands. If this engagement is so pleasing to all concerned, why hasn't it been announced?"

"It's going to be, pretty soon."

"That isn't what I asked you. I asked you why it hadn't been already."

"Giles, I really don't know that it's any of your business. But for old times' sake I'm willing to tell you that there were several reasons. I wanted to straighten out my status at the office. And Mrs. Morton wanted the announcement prepared in my married sister's name, who at that stage didn't even know anything about it, and just the right photographs for illustrations and all that. So it's taken time."

"I shouldn't think it would take the better part of two months. Why don't you tell the truth now, Zoe? Why don't you say that you found one pretext after another for delay? Why don't you confess you've deliberately kept Bob Morton at arm's length? Why don't you tell me he's never been as close to you, and never will be, in any way that matters, as I am at this moment?"

"Because that wouldn't be true. He is close to me, in all the ways that count most."

"And you haven't delayed? You haven't withdrawn?"

"Yes, I've done that. I told you long ago that no man could sweep me off my feet. I'm not made that way. I've got to have time."

"You mean a reprieve, don't you, Zoe? You mean that you came home with the intention of going through with this marriage somehow, but that you've snatched at straws ever since in an effort to escape it, and still prove that your pride was stronger than my passion? If you'd looked forward to it as a rapturous fulfilment, or even as a predestined union, it would have taken place long ago. But you haven't. You've looked at it as a test of your will against mine."

"Giles, I'm sorry to keep repeating myself. But I'll have to tell you again that there's no use in trying to talk to each other, that there isn't anything more to say. Please let go my hands. I'm very tired."

I haven't had much appetite or slept very well lately. In fact, I've been quite ill, these last twenty-four hours. And Bob's been waiting for me, I don't know how long by now."

"What made you ill, Zoe? Why haven't you eaten or slept? If you minded keeping Bob Morton waiting, why did you come here with me at all? Why didn't you go to the Mortons' apartment, just as you planned, and leave to join him as soon as you'd telephoned your story?"

"All right, I will tell you the truth. I haven't eaten or slept because you gave me a body blow last summer and it's taken me a longer time to get over it than I thought it would. But I'm over it now, and I'm not going to let you give me another. I'm not going to let you induce me to marry you and go to Guantanamo with you. If I did, I'd have to live the rest of my life knowing that you were bound to Isabel and I was bound to Bob. Nothing you can offer me would make up to me for the knowledge of that. It would be like a corrosion. It would consume us both. I was so surprised to see you that I couldn't help showing I was glad, too. I couldn't help staying with you long enough to find out why you were here, because I knew there must be something back of it. And then I couldn't help showing you that I'm sorry your life is ruined, that you've let Isabel ruin it. But I'm sorriest of all that you weren't strong enough to stop her, and I'm not going to let you ruin mine. You're not going to come between me and a man who really has courage and character. Let me go, Giles. I don't want to stay any longer. I want to go home."

It was all she could do to drag herself up the stairs. It was more than she could do to put the latchkey in place and open the door. But Bob heard her fumbling at it and came quickly, flinging it wide and taking her in his arms.

He had meant to speak to her sternly. For more than two hours, pacing restlessly and anxiously up and down her living-room, he had planned what he would do and say when she came in. But at the sight of her his heart turned over within him, just as it had when he had seen her lying, small and stricken, in the middle of her big bed. She was weeping again, more bitterly than he had ever heard her cry before; and he saw that the reason she had not been able to open the door was not only because she had been faint with fatigue, but because she had been blinded with tears. He picked her up and carried her down the hallway, marvelling at her littleness and lightness; murmuring words of reassurance and good cheer.

"Don't try to talk, darling. You can tell me what happened by and by when you're better. Everything's all right. I'll send in Pearl Gray to help you get undressed. Then when you're all comfortable and cosy I'll come back and we'll have a drink, and a talk

if you feel like it. But not if you don't. There! Bed feels pretty good, doesn't it?"

He laid her gently down and waited for her to take away her arms from his neck. To his bewilderment she continued to cling to him. In spite of what he had said, she tried to talk with him.

"Bob, did you really mean what you told me? About marrying me? Right away?"

Once more his heart turned over. He could hardly answer her.

"Of course I did, darling. Of course I want to marry you right away. Only you're not ready."

"Yes, I am. I want to marry you. Before anything else happens. Before anyone takes me away from you."

He would not let her say anything more that night. But the next day she told him, coherently, everything that had occurred. He listened in silence until she was through. Then he questioned her.

"You know how I feel, Zoe. There's no use going into all that again. But I've got to understand a little better how you feel. Do you want to marry me now just because you're afraid that if you don't——"

"Partly. But not just. I can't bear to start all over again with Giles. And I know I shall if he's here for the next two weeks and can get at me. I want to get away from him, where he can't touch me, where he can't find me. But I'm not just using you, Bob. I do care about you. I care more and more all the time. If only Giles hadn't come——"

"Yes, I know that. I know that everything was beginning to work out all right. I was—awfully happy over it. But now he has come, you've seen him again. He's upset you terribly. Are you sure——"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Don't let's have any misunderstanding about this, Zoe. If you marry me, you've got to play the game. I don't expect you to act like an enraptured bride, but I do expect you to be a good sport."

"Yes, I know. And I'll try to be. If—if you'll be patient with me. If you'll make it as easy for me as you can."

"It bothers me to have you talk to me like that, Zoe. As if you were a fractious child thrust into the care of an irritable relative, or as if I were a dentist and you'd finally steelled yourself into having all your teeth out. You know how much I love you. You know I wouldn't make anything hard for you if I could help it. But I might not be able to help it. I'd be your husband. I'd act like other husbands. I'd make mistakes. So would you. Sometimes it seems to me you make things hard for yourself. If you don't dare take a chance on me, this is the time to say so. After this, you can't go back on what you've said to me."

"I do dare. I won't go back on what I've said."

She went to William Ruthven the next morning and asked for the week-end off. She would like to get away on Friday, she said, as Saturday was Columbus Day, and not report again for work until Monday. He nodded his head, looking at her with the nearest approach to benignancy that she had ever seen him display.

"Might as well make it Tuesday while you're about it. You've got it coming to you. I'd like you to stay on call till Friday, but you needn't report at the office unless I send for you. You still look rather white around the gills. It was pretty plucky of you to get out of bed and chase up that scoop for me. I appreciate it. So does Mr. Kahn."

"Thanks very much. By the way, I think it's fairer to tell you—I'm planning to get married while I'm off. But it won't make any difference in my work."

Mr. Ruthven nodded again. "I hope I can depend on that, and maybe I can in your case. Usually I wouldn't be so sure. Anyhow, good luck to you. Bob Morton's not a bad fellow. I'm sort of glad you're giving him a break, though I sure will be sore if he spoils a crack reporter by making her into a run of the mill housekeeper. And sooner or later you may get a shock if you're starting out with the idea that you'll wear the family pants. I'm discovering that he isn't such a light weight as I thought at first."

"I discovered that long ago—and I haven't any delusions concerning the pants—Bob explained about those in words of one syllable. Just the same, he's promised not to interfere with my writing. You really can depend on that."

Mr. Ruthven gave a short bark, expressive of incredulity and impatience, but he followed it up by a repetition of good wishes, and in the course of the next two days these poured in on Zoe from all sorts of unexpected sources. The announcement of the engagement was given a big show, as a concrete evidence of the paper's support. The girls in the office insisted on giving her a shower; the men banded together and bought her a silver service; and the climax came when Mrs. Kahn called her up and said that she and Mr. Kahn would be very pleased to have the marriage take place in their home. It would be no trouble to them at all—they would be delighted to do it. Zoe did not question the lack of inconvenience they would be caused, for it was common knowledge that their palatial residence, crowning the hillside between the Majestic Hotel and Greystone Towers, ran on greased wheels, and that their extensive retinue was quite capable of carrying the burden of any sort of entertaining, at a moment's notice. Their delight, however, was a different matter, and Zoe was both surprised and flattered to find that this sentiment existed.

"I can have the real wedding I wanted, after all," she told Bob. "That is, unless you'd rather not. You don't actually mind having me look like a bride, do you?"

I'd still rather have you act like one. And I hate to have you do one more thing to wear yourself out, when you're on your last legs already. But I'm glad you can have all the trimmings. I know they seem important to you. And it's nice of your sister and brother-in-law to come on, at a moment's notice like this. I suppose your brother-in-law will give you away? And had you thought of asking Helen to do anything?"

"Of course. 'Miss Helen Morton, the groom's only sister, who acted as maid of honour, was the bride's only attendant. She was charmingly attired in turquoise blue velvet, with a large plumed hat to match. She carried talisman roses, tied with long streamers of turquoise-coloured ribbon. Mrs. Morton, the groom's mother, wore dark plum-coloured crêpe, cut on simple lines, and a plum-coloured toque. Mrs. Samuel Kahn, who received the wedding guests informally, both before and after the ceremony, chose——'"

"Hold on, Zoe, I'm not interested in the entire society section of Saturday morning's *Examiner*. If I've got to hear about clothes, I'd rather have you talk about your own."

"No. I want those to burst on you as a surprise. But don't worry. You'll like them."

It would have been impossible to help liking them. Zoe was a breath-taking bride. She wore none of the furbelows that had complicated the costume in which Veronique had gone to the altar. Zoe's straight white satin dress fitted her like a sheath; the close-cut sleeves came to her wrists, and two smooth bands of lace were folded across her breast; she carried a white prayer-book and no flowers. But the very restraint of her garments made them effective. The cap covered her hair without concealing it, the breast bands were infinitely more alluring than a daring décolletage. When Bob and Zoe reached their suite at the Hotel Commodore, early that evening, almost the first words that Bob spoke to Zoe betrayed how much both had been on his mind during their trip over on the Congressional.

"Zoe, have you a lot of hair?"

"Rather. I've never cut it. Why?"

"I haven't seen it loose, you know. That time you fainted, and the other time I saw you in bed, you'd just tumbled in without taking it down. I wish you'd show it to me."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. And you could take off your travelling outfit, too. Couldn't you? I thought we'd have dinner up here."

She looked at him without replying, but after a brief pause she went into the little bedroom, and when she came back her hair was tumbling over her shoulders, and she was wearing a sea-green dressing-gown. Bob told her dinner was all ordered—tomato soup and minute steak, fried potatoes and succotash, chocolate ice cream and coffee. White rock, too. He had everything they needed to go

with that in his grip; he'd go and get it in a minute. He described the unimaginative menu as if he were proud of having chosen it without her co-operation. Then he stood for a moment, stroking her hair back from her temples and running his fingers through its length.

"It's beautiful, Zoe," he said. "Beautiful—— I had no idea. I can't tell you how I feel about it, or what it means to me to have you here, with it down like this." He drew her closer to him and buried his face in her breast. When he finally raised it again, he spoke in a shaken voice.

"You were sweet to humour me about this, darling. You're all through being fierce now, aren't you?"

"Yes. But now that you've seen my hair, I think I'd better put it up again, before the waiter comes, don't you?"

"I suppose so. Do you mind if I watch you while you do it?"

"A little. It's always made me nervous to have anyone watch me doing my hair. There's so much of it and it's such a big job to handle it."

"But you've got to get over being nervous about having me watch you, Zoe. Because of course I'm going to do it all the time. I'm going to lie in bed every Sunday morning, and every other morning when we don't have to work, and watch you do your lovely hair. Promise me you'll never cut it."

"All right, I promise. But do let me get it up now, before the waiter comes."

She did not succeed in doing that, because Bob interrupted her too often. He wanted to run his hands through it just once more. He wanted to kiss her again. But at last she had it back in smooth coils, and he did not molest her while she pretended to eat the dinner which he devoured with good appetite. And when he had finished, he sat and smoked, apparently content, for a long time. The waiter came and cleared away the dishes, and rattled along down the long corridor, leaving a trail of silence behind him. Bob went on smoking, silently, without suggesting a move. But Zoe knew this was because he was hoping that she would do so herself, and at last she managed to meet his eyes and summon a smile.

"You'd like me to go and put on that long white nightgown now, wouldn't you, the kind you talked about? I did get one."

"You know I would. I'd begun to be afraid you'd forgotten that you're a married lady now, though I did give you a hint before dinner. Sing out when you're ready to have me come in, will you?"

She was conscientious. She did not cheat by loitering in her bath, and it did not seem to her that she took very long. But Bob had knocked on the door before she had called him, before she had tidied the bathroom or gone to the window where he had wanted her to stand. She called back, asking him to wait a minute, and

then, feeling that she had been unfair, told him to come in, anyway. When he did, she saw a swift look of disappointment cross his face. He put out his hand and touched her dressing-gown.

"Would you be cold without this?"

"No. I put it on from force of habit. I can take it off."

She did so, deliberately, folding it neatly over the back of a chair.

"Is that better?"

"Lots better. Now you look the way I thought you would. Only much lovelier. You're an absolute knock-out."

He put his arm around her, drawing her gently towards him. She did not repulse him, but neither did she return his caress, and her very stillness, suggesting inner turmoil, was disquieting to him. He was even more distressed, soon afterwards, when he realized that her lips were quivering under his. He knew this was not the coyness of a coquette, tantalizing a thwarted lover. Neither was it the startled shyness of ignorance, facing menacing mysteries for the first time. It was the subconscious revolt of a sincere and normal girl, schooled in defensive self-control and once hurt beyond healing, against any emotional abandonment; it was the involuntary disability for spontaneous surrender.

His understanding gave him loving-kindness. He tried to talk to her, patiently and persuasively, and though he continued to caress her, he did so without insistence. But gradually he grasped the fact that tact and tenderness alone would never win her. There was no deep desire, rushing out to meet his, to sweep her past the point of instinctive recoil. He must take her beyond that himself, as best he could; and suddenly something primal told him that there was only one way to do it. Delay was disastrous, because it prolonged her dread. He spoke to her, no longer soothingly, but urgently.

"Zoe, I told you that if you couldn't face this, you mustn't marry me. But you said you were ready to be my wife and I believed you. You promised and I counted on you. You can't let me down now."

Hours later he turned to look at her in the dim light. While the darkness lasted he had lain for a long time, shrinking from what morning might reveal. It seemed to him that the night must inevitably have left its mark. He tried to tell himself that he could not change the inscrutable laws of life, which so often decreed that mating, like maternity, should take heavy toll from a woman. But he could not shift the responsibility on callous nature or a cruel God. He knew that he was alone accountable for what he had done and how he had done it. Holding Zoe fast, he had lost all sense of reason and restraint. He had not thought about trying to spare her. For a long time he had not thought at all——

Darkness merged into dawn and he gazed wonderingly down at

the girl who was now his wife. She did indeed seem changed, but not in the way he expected. She no longer looked small and forlorn, as she had when he had first seen her alone in her big bed. She had somehow gained in stature and in dignity. She was sleeping profoundly, and her quiet face, framed by her bright hair, was unmarred by any sign of struggle or suffering. There was a softness to it, a glow, that he had never seen before. He marvelled that there should be such tranquillity and such a bloom about her.

She stirred slightly, murmured under her breath, and put out her arms. He lay very still, supposing that she was still asleep and wondering what the unconscious gesture meant. Then he saw that she had opened her eyes and that she was looking at him with an expression of infinite love. He did not dare to move. But she was coming closer to him of her own accord and putting her outstretched arms around his neck.

"Dearest," she said softly. She had never called him that before, and somehow the word had infinite meaning. "I'm still half-asleep. I don't know what's real and what isn't. Except that you made me come across. That part's true, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said hoarsely, "that part's true. But, Zoe, I want to tell you something——"

"No. Please. Not yet. I want to tell you something first."

She nestled against him, contentedly, as if it were natural for her to do so. His heart began to bound with joy again, because he saw that she was not afraid of him any more and he wondered if he in turn might caress her. As if she divined his thought, she lifted her face.

"I'm awake now, wide awake. And before you say anything to me, I want to say I'm sorry I let you down. I never will again. You'll forgive me, won't you? And give me another chance? So I can show you how much I love you."

He was beginning to understand. She did not hate him because he had hurt her. She was happy because she was his. She was released, she was ready for rapture. And he had released her, he had made her ready. He gathered her into his arms and held her, harder than before, and still she did not shrink away, but clung to him, kissing him and keeping him with her.

"I've belonged to you since last night," she murmured at last. "But now we belong to each other. That's better still, isn't it? That's what marriage means. A real marriage like ours."

What she said was true. She was bone of his bone now, flesh of his flesh, as he was of hers. That was what life meant, the ultimate that it held, its legacy from the past, its promise for the future. Robert Morton, tasting the brimming cup for the first time to the full, knew that it would never leave his lips again until he had drained it to the last drop.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Zoe walked into William Ruthven's office early Tuesday morning he greeted her with a grunt.

"So you're back on time," he said, almost grudgingly. "I didn't expect you before tomorrow at the earliest."

"I wish you'd told me that in the first place. I could have used another day in New York. I only went to a couple of shows—Leslie Howard in 'Berkeley Square' and Noel Coward in 'Bittersweet.' I wanted to see the 'Sketchbook' and the 'Scandals,' too, and I didn't begin to make the rounds of the best 'speaks.' But I usually try to keep my word. I don't always succeed, but I try. And I respond very quickly to a gentle reminder."

From under his green shade William Ruthven studied her covertly but appraisingly. There was something about the tone of her voice that had a ring to it, like music. What she said was trite enough, but the way she said it was arresting. Her appearance was arresting, too. He had always thought Zoe Wing was a very striking girl, but lately she had looked so ill and harried that he had been worried about her. Now she was positively blooming. And she had walked into his office as if she owned the world. Funny, it wasn't so long since she had wormed her way in under false pretences, hoping against hope that he would give her a job. Now he was beginning to share Mr. Kahn's concern lest they would not be able to keep her at any price. It was an open secret that Miles Meacham, the editor of the *New York Enterprise*, was after her, aided and abetted by Bert Scruggs, and Miles Meacham usually got what he wanted.

"Sit down," he said, "and tell me what you've got on your mind. That series on lobbying is going over fine. But we've got to follow it up with another knock-out. What would you suggest?"

"I sort of hoped that by the time we got through with the lobbyists the gentlemen who are their principal prey would have adjourned and I could have something that's called a vacation."

"Congress doesn't show the slightest sign of adjourning. The Tariff Bill will be just a limp rag by the time those guys get through with it. We've got to have something with more meat on it. And a vacation on top of a wedding trip is too much."

"I'd know what to do with a combination of the two," Zoe said in the same extraordinary tone in which she had remarked that she could have used another day. "One swallow doesn't make a summer, and one week-end in New York isn't enough time for a honeymoon. I liked the sample well enough to want some more of the same."

"Well, I suppose you'll be angling for long week-ends, anyway."

"Yes. I was going to speak to you about that. I think we'll have to spend the next one readjusting my apartment to male requirements. Bob has simply moved in there, bag and baggage, and none of the bags or baggage are disposed of yet. I suppose he's entitled to at least a cupboard and a chest of drawers, and possibly a desk and a place to put pipes. I don't know much about it, but I should think that would represent a reasonable minimum of space for a husband. Wouldn't you?"

"I don't know anything at all about it. I'm a bachelor."

"You unfortunate man! I've often wondered why your outlook on life was so glum. Now I know all. Why didn't you tell me that a little sooner? I'd have set my cap for you myself."

"Fat chance. I couldn't have competed either with the Navy or the Senate, let alone all the also-rans that you've had cluttering up this place ever since you came here." Then, as he noticed another inexplicable expression, like a slight shadow, cross her face, he went on, "So you're staying in town this next week-end, and I suppose if there's another scandal in the Cabinet you'll stop putting away socks and shirts long enough to go and chase it up for me. But the next Sunday you want to be off again. Is that the idea?"

"Yes, Bob and I want to go down to Hunter's Green, near Berryville. You know, the place that belongs to Veronique and Welby Hunter. Bob and I are very fond of them both. And, besides, I think it's barely possible I might get a feature story out of the trip."

She told him, briefly, about the material Ronnie had given her. He listened with more attention than she had dared to hope for. Then he made an unexpected suggestion.

"I haven't a doubt that a lot of those old plantations in Virginia could be played up—lots of ghosts and glamour, big picture spreads, all that sort of stuff. Most of them have gardens, and now that the Garden Club in Virginia has started the ball rolling by opening up a few places to the public, there's bound to be a demand for more information about them. Yes, I think you've got something there, Zoe. But it isn't down your alley. You do people better than places—the reason your travel stuff is so good is because you pack it full of human interest. The scenery and the architecture are nothing but background. Why not get Bob to do a piece on Hunter's Green and one or two other nearby estates? It would tie in well with what he's done already, and if we got a good reader response we could work up a series that would go on almost indefinitely. Talk it over with him while you're sorting out those socks and shirts. If he likes the idea you could send him down here."

"I'm afraid I couldn't 'send' him anywhere. But of course he'd

be tickled to death to come. Thanks a lot, Mr. Ruthven. I appreciate the chance and so will he."

She rose quickly. William Ruthven could see that mentally she was already speeding on her way to Bob Morton's side.

"Sit down," he said irritably. "What's your hurry? I'm not half through talking to you yet. I've been waiting for a chance to talk to you again about that little syndicate of yours. Do you really care about keeping on with it?"

"Why, yes. That syndicate was my first baby, Mr. Ruthven. I wouldn't abandon it for anything."

"When you have a real baby I suppose I won't be able to stop you from getting soft about it. But I don't see why you should get so sentimental over an insignificant chain of hick papers."

"I've got three times as many papers as when I started out. And they're not all hick papers any more, either. I've got one in Memphis and one in Louisville and one in San Antonio and——"

"You don't say!" observed Mr. Ruthven sarcastically. "Romance has agreed with you in some ways, Zoe—you don't look so much like a plucked chicken any more. But I don't think much of love's effect on your mental powers—you'll be telling me next that you write for the *Washington Examiner*. What I'm coming to is, you ought to do a good deal more with that syndicate or a good deal less."

"Meaning exactly what?"

"Meaning that if you'll give it up and write exclusively for us, the *Examiner* would do almost the same thing for you that the *New York Times* has done for Anne O'Hare McCormick. And we believe it would be reciprocal. We've told you something to that effect already. On the other hand, if you won't give it up, then your work for the *Examiner* ought not to be aside from the syndicate, it ought to be part of it. You've never neglected one for the other yet, but you've got to begin to concentrate more pretty soon. Have your own bureau, here in Washington, and a secretary, and maybe a research assistant, too. Or a partner. I don't know. I haven't worked out the details."

"You didn't think of Bob as a possible partner, did you, Mr. Ruthven?"

"I told you I hadn't worked out the details. The *Examiner* would prefer the former plan, anyhow. But since you would go and get married——"

"Anne O'Hare McCormick is married, Mr. Ruthven."

"Don't argue with me. And don't sit there all the morning doing nothing, either. Go out and get to work. And let me do some, too."

Zoe did do a good day's work, but she managed to be on Capitol Hill at lunch-time, and also to be back in Eye Street before Bob's return from the Senate Office Building. The plan of having Bob come to her apartment had worked out very well. Zoe did not want

to move again when she had just installed herself in such a pleasant way, and the stately high-ceilinged old rooms were so spacious that it would have been absurd to pretend they could not easily accommodate an extra person, especially, as Bob pointed out, when the last thing that person wanted was an extra bed. Pearl Gray, whose avocation during leisure hours had long consisted of an avid reading of that old classic entitled "True Romance," was enchanted to find herself actually within sight and hearing of one. Senator Morton, on the other hand, had been seeking an excuse for some time to move into less pretentious quarters, and Bob's marriage gave him the pretext that he needed. Indeed, with a little help from Helen, he succeeded in persuading his wife that they could now get along comfortably and presentably, not only with one less bedroom and bath, but without a reception-room as well; having only Helen at home, they should be able to manage with a living-room and a sun-room. Senator Morton did not try to dislodge his wife from the Majestic, in which her affections were strongly centred, but they did shift from the south to the north side of the hotel, where a small housekeeping suite had providentially just become vacant. The harassed statesman breathed a sigh of relief when the move had actually been made.

"I'm going to take the seventy-five dollars I save every month and put it right into paying back bills," he told Bob confidentially. "Debts always worry me. You know that, son. And mine are piling up higher and higher all the time. I try to talk to your mother about it, but she doesn't seem to understand. Well, I suppose women just naturally don't think about these things."

"Zoe does," Bob said with pride. "She has a budget and keeps inside it. She puts money into the savings bank, too. And helps educate all her younger brothers and sisters. Lord! I don't see how she does it! She's a wonder, that's what she is."

"Yes, she's a very capable girl. You're fortunate, Bob, to have such a helpmeet. I hope you appreciate her."

"I'll say I do."

"When I said women don't think so much about these things, I was referring more to the older generation. They weren't taught to know the value of money the way girls who earn it themselves do nowadays. You know I wasn't casting any reflection on your mother, Bob. She's a very fine woman, and she's capable in her own way, too. Now, she can handle a committee meeting better than I can. But when it comes to a budget, that's different. So those debts do worry me. And I find our credit isn't what it once was. Besides, I didn't like the looks of that crash on the fifth. You were pretty busy about other things just then, Bob, so maybe you didn't pay much attention to the stock market reports. There was a long drop and then a sharp rise——"

"But there was a rise——"

"Yes. But not a normal drop or a normal rally. Nearly two and a half million shares were dealt in and the ticker was forty minutes behind."

Bob gave a low whistle. "That is going some. But then you haven't got an awful lot of securities, anyway, Dad."

"No. So I worry all the more about the few I have got. I keep telling myself that as long as the Mortonville Bank stays solvent I'll be all right. And, of course, it will. But I can't afford to take any kind of a loss just now. And conditions don't look as good to me generally as they did in the last administration."

It would have taken a good deal more than a reference to a stock market crash to upset Bob in those days. He did mean to mention the matter to Zoe and ask her whether she had noticed the reports which had escaped his preoccupied attention; if she had, he intended to tease her a little, telling her that it was just as he suspected, her mind had really not been on marriage at all. But when he reached home that night he found Zoe bursting with the news of her conversation with Mr. Ruthven, and became absorbed in the subject so quickly himself that he forgot all about his talk with his father. It was not until the following Sunday, which, according to Zoe's careful plan, they spent in completing the re-organization of their apartment, that it was rudely brought back to his memory.

"Good gosh!" he exclaimed, jumping up from the depths of the lounge chair where he had finally settled down to smoke and read while he "took a snifter" to restore himself after his strenuous efforts. "Have you read the *New York Times* today, Zoe?"

"No, not yet," she called to him from the kitchen. In the absence of Pearl Gray, who had the afternoon off on Sunday, she was preparing an evening "snack" which they could eat together in front of the living-room fire, according to a custom she loved. "Don't try to shout. I'll be along in a minute."

"Well, put down whatever it is you're fixing and come here. I've found something that sounds as if it really might be serious."

She wrapped a damp cloth over the colander containing the crisp lettuce she had been washing and replaced it carefully in the small electric refrigerator. Then she dried her hands and rubbed them with lotion. But she did not take off her fresh apron. She came back into the living-room still wearing it and sat down on the arm of Bob's chair. He put his arm around her and swung her into his lap.

"This is the first thing I happened to pick up," he said. "The Washington papers are all buried somewhere at the bottom of the pile. Did they all carry this item, too?"

"Well, give me a chance to see what it is you're talking about and I'll tell you."

"I'm not trying to stop you from seeing. I'm only trying to make you comfortable while you read. You'll need a little support. Look at that banner line."

"STOCKS DRIVEN DOWN
AS WAVE OF SELLING
ENGULFS MARKET"

she read aloud, and went on, her practised eye sweeping down the text swiftly.

"Losses of 5 to 20 Points in
Heavy Trading Put Level at
Lowest in *Present Trend*"

"Reactionary forces took control of the stock market yesterday and, with a devastating sweep, reduced the value of listed securities to the lowest levels reached in the current decline. In the two hours to which trading was limited on the New York Exchange, active issues passed through one of the widest breaks in history. . . ."

"Well, that doesn't sound so good, does it? I'm sorry for all those 'little speculators' who are 'bowled over by the hundreds.' But this won't hurt us, Bob. We've both got decent salaries and we won't lose them, whatever happens to the stock market. What makes you so worried?"

"I'm worried about Dad, Zoe. He spoke to me about the first crash, the one on the fifth. He was terribly troubled over that. I'm afraid he'll be more troubled still over this. I'm going to telephone him, if you don't mind."

"Why don't you ask him to come and have supper with us, if he isn't doing anything special? Your mother and Helen, too, of course."

"But gosh, Zoe, that would make an awful lot of work for you! Hadn't we better go up to the Majestic, after we've had our own supper, instead? Except that we wouldn't have our evening alone. And that's what I really want."

"You know I don't mind the work. And if they come to supper, perhaps they'll leave early too. Then we'd still have part of the evening left to ourselves. If your father's been indoors all day, worrying, it'll do him good to get out."

The response to Bob's telephone call was almost pathetically eager. Senator Morton answered himself, and admitted that he had spent a pretty dreary day, that he was greatly concerned. It was kind of Zoe to take so much trouble. If it really wouldn't put her out, they would be right along. A bite was all they needed. They had had a big dinner——

A bite was, indeed, all that he himself could be persuaded to eat. But Mrs. Morton made a hearty meal, and Helen revealed her

characteristic appreciation of Zoe's highly successful efforts. It was their first visit to the apartment since the return of the bridal pair, and Helen insisted that it was an imposition to intrude on their blissful solitude. But Senator Morton's relief at being with Bob swallowed up all his scruples concerning intrusion. He glanced about as if seeking some place where they could withdraw to talk as man to man; and when Zoe saw the glance she suggested that they should stay on in the dining-room to smoke after supper "in the selfish way Englishmen do." Senator Morton looked at her with eyes full of gratitude, and spoke about her to Bob after he and his father were alone.

"I've always known Zoe was a capable girl, Bob. Why, she didn't make any work at all out of that fine supper for five! But I didn't realize she was so thoughtful and kindhearted. Sometimes you get the idea from her pieces——"

"Yes, I know. But she is kindhearted. She's tops in every way."

"You and she don't have to worry about money, do you? That is, you can get along somehow."

"We can get along darn well. Zoe has a good salary now. Better than mine by a long shot."

Bob gave a rueful grin, and his father nodded, gravely, grasping that it was galling to Bob to have Zoe the larger wage-earner of the two. "But I'm making more on my feature stories than I did at first. And we think that maybe now something else is opening up, something that we can do together. I'll be able to tell you in a few weeks. Now tell me what's eating you."

It appeared that a good deal was "eating" Senator Morton. General Electric and General Motors had both taken bad drops. Even "Tel. and Tel." was unstable. He could not imagine what things were coming to. They looked serious.

"They'll probably look better in the morning, Dad. I don't believe this is anything but a flurry. I'll snoop around a bit tomorrow and, of course, Zoe will, too. I bet we'll have good news for you. And, after all, what does it matter if you've dropped a few hundred? You can always get them back again."

"That's just it, Bob. I don't know whether I can or not. And every hundred counts. Every dollar counts. There isn't a tradesman in town who isn't hounding me."

"Why don't you cash and carry? That's what we do."

Bob spoke as if he had been doing it for five years instead of five days. His father looked at him with a wintry smile.

"Well, it's a fine way to start out. As I said before, you've got a good wife."

"I'll say I have."

He really thought there was solid ground for the cheery way in which he had spoken to his father. But neither his "snooping"

nor Zoe's revealed anything in the least reassuring. Calm statements were beginning to come from high sources. "Officials hold that decline in stocks will not disturb business materially," they all read. But just who the officials were who remained so unperturbed in the face of the next two days' wild financial confusion, it was hard to find out. Everyone whom Bob and Zoe saw personally was candidly concerned, and this dismay reflected the apprehension which was said to be creeping over stockholders generally, even those who still had substantial profits to their credit. Rich men like Senator Hyde were looking preternaturally grave when they rose to speak in the Chamber; rich women like Mrs. Burgess were lamenting their losses when they went to receptions. Zoe based a satirical sketch on the lament she heard from this prominent matron, who had cancelled her subscription to Mrs. Townsend's morning musicales because she could not now see her way clear to buying a new mink coat. But when Zoe drifted in to see Brenda Bryant for a moment, after she herself was through for the day, she found Brenda in the dumps.

"It's all very well for you to write a funny piece about a mink coat," the society editor said, in a tone which betrayed the fact that she herself had not been amused by it. "But if this keeps on, those darn dowagers will do a lot more than cancel subscriptions to concerts. They'll start clamping down on luncheons and dinners, and presently I won't have a thing to write about. Then the word will go around that Mr. Kahn thinks too much space is being given to society, anyway, and that we ought to get along with a smaller staff. After that the only question will be who's going to be let out slow and easy and who's going to be let out hard and quick."

"There'll also be the question of who's going to stay. I think you can stick, if you put your mind to it. Besides, it's too early to start talking about cancelled parties yet. You know those dowagers of yours will give everything else up first. They'll scrimp on coal, and underpay or overwork their servants, and make the poor old rattling Rolls Royce go another year, and forget to send allowance money to their children who are off at college. But they'll still have dinners in honour of any celebrity or near celebrity they can snag, on purpose so that you can write about them and thus call their existence to the laggard attention of other dowagers who are giving similar dinners."

"Zoe, it sends cold shivers down my back to hear you talk about their starting to scrimp in any way. That would just be the beginning of the end. Let's get out of here. I'm going home to get a drink."

"Come on up to Eye Street and have a drink with me."

"And barge into Bob in his present loony state? You're bad enough, Zoe, but he is simply the limit. No, thanks. Give me a

raincheck and let me know when that husband of yours begins to come back to earth again. See you in the morning."

Zoe laughed and went out alone. She was hospitable by nature. Nevertheless, she was glad that Brenda had declined her invitation. She enjoyed the walk up the Avenue and across Lafayette Square; the exercise was refreshing instead of tiring now that she felt so much stronger, and as she approached the fine old house in which her apartment was located, she quickened her pace to keep up with her quickened heart beats. She had always loved going back to whatever little cubbyhole she could call home after her day's work was over, even when this was mean and small and shabby, and she had her own supper to get and her own house-cleaning and laundry work still to do. Now Pearl Gray would have the lamps lighted and the fire burning in the living-room, and the dining-room table would be daintily laid for two and the excellent dinner well under way, awaiting only the arrival of Bob and herself before the finishing touches were given to it while they had their cocktails. Bob would be listening for the sound of her footsteps on the stairs, for his hours were shorter than hers and he got home first; he would be waiting to open the door for her and gather her into his arms. He would have had his shower already, but he would sit in the bedroom and smoke while she had hers, shouting to her through the open door above the sound of the rushing water; and then he would watch her getting into fresh clothes and doing her hair, interrupting her every now and then, and all the time intensifying her feeling of precious intimacy and sheltered happiness. Then they would linger over their cocktails and their dinner, telling each other all the important things that had happened during the day while they were parted from each other, and discussing their future plans, both those which Mr. Ruthven had put into their minds and those which they kept thinking up of their own accord. And finally they would go to bed, so eager for the full expression and experience of each other's love, that when they fell asleep they would still be locked in each other's arms, and when they waked again they would be still enraptured, still embraced—

"I've got everything," Zoe murmured to herself, speeding across the last block with her eyes lifted to her own lighted windows. "Everything I hoped for and waited for and worked for. And then Bob besides. It's almost too much. If I'd always had it, none of it would have so much meaning. I'm glad now that I was a poor little hungry lonely alleycat, mad at everybody, prowling around by myself and snarling at my enemies. I know the difference between that and being safe and sheltered and loved and so happy that it hurts."

Again she quickened her pace, but still it was not taking her fast enough towards home. The lighted windows of her living room, which ran all the way across the second story of the house, gave .

the final impetus to her speed. She took the stairs two at a time. Then, instinctively, she waited a minute for Bob to open the door. Nothing happened. Instead of using her latchkey, she rang twice, impatiently. She wanted to summon Pearl Gray at once.

"Isn't Mr. Morton home!" she asked breathlessly.

"No, mam. He ain't come in yet."

"Hasn't he telephoned to say what's delayed him?"

"No, mam. The foam ain't rang for two hours or mo'. I've writ down all de messages dat done come in before dat, jes' lak' you done tol' me. Dey's layin' on yo' desk, aloneside ob yo' mail."

Pearl Gray retreated, with an unmistakable air of injury. She was good-natured in the face of early breakfasts, late dinners, unexpected company, heavy cleaning, and multitudinous pressing; but it hurt her pride when her reliability was questioned, even by implication. Zoe did not stop to placate Pearl. She rushed to the telephone herself. Then, wisely, she stopped. She must not begin, ten days after her marriage, to check on her husband's activities, to hound him if he were detained or give him the idea that she was annoyed if he were not waiting to welcome her. He had promised her complete freedom of movement and he was keeping his promise, scrupulously. She knew that if she herself did not get in until three o'clock in the morning he would not ask her where she had been or why she had gone there. He would wait until she volunteered the information. It was ridiculous of her to be so anxious and so possessive. But it was only one more sign of the way his love had permeated to every fibre of her being.

Zoe turned, with her hand already on the receiver, and went over to her desk. Pearl Gray had stated simple facts. The telephone messages and the mail lay side by side in two neat piles. There were a large number of invitations, a few bills, various notices of bargain sales and several begging letters. At the bottom of the letter pile was a thick envelope with a Berryville postmark. Zoe flung her hat down on the sofa, lighted a cigarette, and seated herself in the big lounge chair before opening the envelope to see what Veronique had to say.

"DEAR ZOE", (she read),

"Of course we are thrilled to learn that you and Bob can come down on the 26th and that there is a possibility you may be able to stay on into the next week. You know you'll be more than welcome for as long a time as you can make it.

"I think though that before you come I ought to tell you we have a paying guest just now and who it is. I was terribly surprised to get a letter from Isabel Windsor a few weeks ago, saying she was rather at loose ends, and asking if she could come down here for a little while. It seems she got back from Europe earlier than she'd expected, after a disappointing summer. She said Helen left her

to join you, because she had a sort of nervous breakdown and found she had to keep very quiet, and you could give Helen so much better a time than she could. After that she didn't have any companionship at all. The only villa she could get at Deauville was very 'primitive' according to her, and it rained most of the time, the way it's apt to in Normandy. She was so lonely and uncomfortable there that finally she decided to come home, and then she had a horrid stormy crossing on a ship where all the other passengers were very common people and she couldn't get any decent accommodation. There were no private parlours, and Sarah was separated from her by two decks and there was only a shower in her bathroom. She meant to go straight back to Washington, but her house was still dismantled and half the servants still away on their vacations and the heat most unseasonable. (Have you minded it? You haven't said.) She remembered that when she was here last spring I talked, tentatively, about taking in paying guests sometime, and she wondered if I wouldn't let her have half the house to herself until the first of November. Welby thought we ought to invite her to come in the usual way, but I told him that was absurd, when Isabel had more money than she knew what to do with and would have to spend money to stay somewhere and we might as well have it as anyone else. It isn't as if I would have ever invited her of my own accord to make an extended visit because I've always thought that a little of Isabel went a long way. Well, anyhow, I wrote back setting a price that Welby said I ought to be ashamed of. But I wasn't and she came. She has the whole west wing to herself, and she doesn't bother us much during the daytime, but usually she sends us word by Sarah that she'd like to dine with us because the evenings seem so long and lonely. I felt sort of sorry for her, in a way, the first time she sent me a touching little message, because the evenings seemed that way to me too when I first came here. So I said all right and now she monopolizes most of our time from seven o'clock onwards. I'm terribly sorry we can't have the house to ourselves the way we did when you came down the last time, but I know you'll understand and make the best of it.

"Candace is here, too, which makes conditions even more crowded. I think she's decided Vittorio Fopiano is her best bet after all and that matters are coming to a climax between her and the noble Roman. It has its amusing side, as far as I'm concerned, for two reasons. First because she used to poke so much fun at my title, and now she's hectically grabbing at one herself. And second because she raised such an awful row when she found I was 'reverting' to my own religion, and now she goes and has long serious talks with Father Flynn about marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics and even about the most painless methods of 'conversion.' Well, you may get more of a story here than you were

expecting, but keep everything I've told you under your hat and spring your scoop when the time comes, according to your well-known habit. I'm sure there's been an application for a licence, because Mr. Merrill, the County Clerk, came to see me this morning about something else, and when he was leaving he said, evidently supposing I knew all about the matter, 'I hope Miss Candace didn't take it amiss because I asked her to shove up her age a little. The date of her birth as she gave it to me was six years after her father died, and we all thought the world of her mother around her, and there never was a breath against her reputation.'

"Well, with this tidbit I'll cruise along and feed Bennie, who's been howling for the last half-hour in his crib. He's suddenly commenced to creep and is all over the place unless I pen him in. So I've had to give up the cradle, which I hated to do because it was so pretty and so handy to haul around.

"Welby sends his best to you and Bob and so do I. I'll be seeing you.

"As ever,
"RONNIE."

Zoe laid down the letter with mingled feelings of amusement, eagerness and disappointment. She enjoyed Ronnie's story about the conscientious County Clerk, and her news sense was stimulated by the hint of Candace Hunter's matrimonial intentions; she wondered if a word concerning them would not prove cheering to poor Brenda Bryant, and whether she ought not to call up Brenda and tell her that she had wind of something that might liven up the Sunday society section. But it was certainly a blow to learn that Isabel Windsor, of all persons, was installed at Hunter's Green. She tried to tell herself that she ought to be grateful to Isabel, who had unconsciously and involuntarily been her benefactress. If it had not been for Isabel she would have stayed on in Europe, wandering restlessly around and trying to decide what to do about Giles; she would not have had a home and husband and everything which suddenly meant more to her than all the excitement in the world. But the fact remained that, however advantageous the results, Isabel had treated her with cat-like cruelty, just as Isabel had carelessly and callously ruined Giles' career and then declined to stand by him in his hour of trial. She was essentially a callous and cruel woman, and her far-famed charm stopped with her lovely smile and her exquisite skin; there was no inner beauty to redeem and illumine her. Zoe had known all kinds of women, and some of them had been pretty bad. But at the moment there was not one she could think of whom she had ever despised as thoroughly as she did Isabel Windsor.

She was tempted to call off the week-end visit. But this would have meant losing her chance at the new scoop and confessing to

Bob that she could not bring herself to sit down at the table with the woman who was indirectly responsible for their marriage. There would have been no sense in subterfuge, even if she could have conscientiously resorted to it, for Bob was a "wizard" about guessing everything that lay at the back of her mind. Somehow she must make the best of a bad situation. Of course, there was nothing new about that. But she had begun to feel, since she married Bob, that there would be no more bad situations, that everything was settled and beatified; which was just one more sign of what an infatuated fool she was.

She rose from the lounge chair, impatiently stifling a sigh. She must go and get her bath and pretend she did not miss Bob's jolly-ing while she took it. She had also better make sure that Pearl Gray had everything held back for dinner, so that Bob would not get dried-up meat and soggy vegetables when he finally did arrive. She started for the kitchen, but when she was halfway down the corridor the telephone rang. She knocked over the bedside table in her haste to answer it.

"Zoe—have you been worried?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, there's nothing to worry about. That is, nothing much. I'm all right. Thanks for not calling me, just the same."

"I started to, but I figured out you'd call yourself when you got ready."

"Good for you. I'm sorry I can't get home to dinner. Go ahead and have yours without me."

"Dinner will keep. We've got steak. A big fat juicy one. It doesn't need to be put on until you get here. I don't mind waiting."

"I'd honestly rather you didn't. It may be pretty late before I can leave the office."

"Could I help if I came down there? I could bring a cold supper with me and I could hang around."

"No, I'd rather you didn't do that, either. Dad doesn't want anyone around. And that means I don't. I've got to think of him first. Have your dinner, Zoe, and go to bed, like a good girl. I'll be there as soon as I can. So long."

Zoe put down the receiver, set the telephone table right side up again, and went on towards the kitchen, struggling to suppress her hurt feelings. Bob had left her uninformed for hours, and now that he had finally called her up she was still uninformed. All she knew was that his father did not want anyone around and that Bob had to think of his father first. When they had been married just ten days. He told her to go along to bed, like a good girl. He was like all other men, after all. He thought a girl should not share a man's problems and a man's secrets, he thought the best place for her was in bed. He would probably not tell her anything even when he did get home. He would simply make love to her and expect

her to respond. She would have to teach him that he must not expect her to be so responsive if he behaved like that.

Even while she was saying all this to herself she knew that her attitude was as unreasonable as it was futile. Something serious must be the matter, and if Bob had not told her what it was, over the telephone, there was some good reason for this. Of course he would tell her about it when he did get home, or if he did not it would be because there was something affecting his father which he could not tell, even in talking to her, without betraying a confidence. He would take it for granted that she would understand this and show her sympathy by solacing him as well as she could. All Bob's ideas were firmly fixed. She would never get anywhere by either cajolery or withdrawal. He had made that abundantly clear to her already, and since she had already betrayed the fact that she gloried in his forcefulness, any tardy attempt at self-assertion would be unsuccessful.

She told Pearl Gray that she would like a tray in bed after she had taken her bath; and when she had eaten her supper, without appetite or enthusiasm, she tried to read "Roper's Row." But it failed to hold her interest and, after an hour or so, she turned out the light and lay down, intending to listen for Bob and then reverse the usual order of things by opening the door for him. But she was very sleepy, and finally she ceased to struggle against her drowsiness. She had no idea how long she had slept when she waked again and realized that Bob was there beside her. He must have crept in very quietly, taking infinite pains not to disturb her, and her conscience smote her afresh at the memory of her injustice in believing that he would lack consideration of her.

"Bob," she said softly. "Are you awake?"

"Halfway. But I'm trying to go to sleep."

"Please tell me what happened."

"Not now. I'm too dog-tired. I will in the morning. Or tomorrow evening if there isn't time in the morning. Go to sleep yourself, Zoe."

He did not start making love to her as she had expected he would, and she knew this meant that he did not want to, that he did not even think of it. Zoe, having accepted his viewpoint that it was his prerogative to do so whenever he chose, was greatly mystified and a little piqued at his disregard; but presently her consciousness that the underlying reasons for it must be very grave indeed overcame her puzzled resentment. She did not question him again, but she cuddled close to him, believing, and rightly, that he would derive comfort from her nearness. Then she went quietly to sleep again. When she waked the next morning he had gone. He had not even left a letter behind.

She went through her next day's work mechanically, and when evening released her from it, she undertook the walk in which she

had come to delight without alacrity or anticipation. She saw that the living-room was lighted when, from force of habit, she looked up at it; but the door did not swing open at her approach, and she let herself in, this time, with her own latchkey, determined that Pearl Gray should not again be a witness to her anxiety. To her surprise she saw that Bob was already in the living-room, standing in front of the fire with his back to the door. He did not turn around when she entered and, for a moment, injured pride choked her again. Then she went over to him and put her hand gently on his arm.

"Dearest," she said softly. "Do tell me what's the matter. I know you'll feel better when the trouble isn't bottled up inside of you any more. And maybe I could help. Did the new market slump yesterday affect your father worse than the others?"

"Yes. He's about cleaned out."

"But, Bob, he has his salary. His senatorial salary and his salary as the president of the bank at Mortonville. They don't represent riches but they do represent a competence."

"They would if they were clear. But almost every cent of those two salaries has to be paid out in interest. On notes he's been signing for the last twenty years. Before that too, I reckon. I thought I knew everything about his obligations. But a lot of them date back further than I can remember. He must have had debts when he was married, he must have kept adding to them right along. He's cowered under them for years and years. Now they've crushed him. The reason I was thankful you didn't call me up last night was because I'd finally got him to sleep on the couch in his private office. I'd given him something. I don't believe he'd slept more than an hour on end since the first crash over two weeks ago. If the telephone had rung it would have waked him up. And he was so jumpy, anyway, that if he'd been suddenly startled I never could have got him off to sleep again. He'd been crying like a baby, too."

Zoe did not instantly answer. The privations which she had managed to overcome and the prudence with which she had always handled her own hard-earned money alike made her contemptuous of the improvidence of a man who could not manage to live and save within the limits of a secure and substantial income. But, after all, this was not a question of her father-in-law's disastrous weakness and mismanagement; it was a question of her husband's deep distress and her own responsibility as his helpmeet. She could not understand how any money matter, however serious, could render him quite so desperate. But that was also beyond the point. She pressed his arm more tenderly.

"If it's as bad as all that we must do everything we can. You must turn over your secretarial salary to your father until he gets straightened out, and just keep the money from your pieces for your personal incidentals. We can live on what I earn."

"I was afraid you'd say that."

"*Afraid!*"

"Yes. You ought to know me well enough by this time to realize I'd rather die than live on money you earn. As if it weren't bad enough, anyway, to know how little I amount to, compared to you, without having you offer to support me! I can do something. At least, I'm not a helpless cripple like Welby Hunter."

Somehow she bit back the angry answer that rushed to her lips. "You wouldn't talk like this or reason like this if you weren't all worn out," she said, still soothingly. "I'm not offering to support you. I know you've supported yourself ever since you were a boy. I suspect you've saved enough out of what you've earned to help the family, too. Helen told me you always managed to supply the pocket-money for both of you. And I haven't forgotten that two hundred you sent her while she was abroad. I don't want to ask prying questions, I'm not going to. But I suppose that two hundred was just a sample. All I'm offering to do is to release what you're earning so you can help your family still more. If you'd prefer it, we'll live on what you're earning, and I'll turn over my salary to your father. We don't need to do things on our present scale. We can let Pearl Gray go and find a one-room apartment with a kitchenette. I can do my own housework and hold down my job, too. I've done it before."

"Yes, and that's just why you're not going to do it again! You've scrimped and saved and slaved for years to get where you are now. You shan't throw it all over just because you were short-sighted enough to marry me. God! What a fool I was to let you in for this! You'd have been all right if I'd had the sense to let you alone!"

"But, Bob, I'm glad I married you. I—it's hard to put into words. But you must know I love you ever so much more now than I did when you let me alone. You've seen that I do because I can't help showing it. And I—I missed you terribly last night. I think I was meant to be married to someone exactly like you, a man who wouldn't let me ride over him rough-shod the way I've done over most people I've known. Someone with a mind and a code of his own that I could respect. Someone whose will was stronger than mine. Someone who even frightened me at first. I've boasted so often that no one could frighten me——"

"I'm ashamed of having frightened you. I'm ashamed of having made you do anything you didn't want to. I've probably let you in for a hellish mess. I promised you beforehand you wouldn't have a baby. Well, I never even thought about that again until yesterday, when Dad began to show me how much rack and ruin we were in for, and I realized what it would mean if we were caught with a kid to take care of too."

"That's something else I've been meaning to say to you, Bob. I

hope I will have a baby. If I don't have one right away, please don't say it was good luck. Please don't start thinking about that or doing anything about it now. I'd be awfully proud and awfully happy to have a child that was yours. It would mean a lot to me to think you were its father. Please believe me. We could manage somehow. I wouldn't lose my job even if I did have a baby. Editors are awfully decent about things like that. Some papers give their girl reporters six weeks off, with pay, when their children are born. I'm sure the *Examiner* would do that much for me at least. And I could take care of a child all right. If everyone in the family works we can straighten out this tangle in no time. Why, even your mother can get a job. Lots of women her age get good jobs nowadays. And Helen could be the best little wage-earner you ever saw in your life. I heard just yesterday about a vacancy in the Prohibition Enforcement unit. Bert's bootlegger told me about it. It would suit Helen to a T."

"Helen! Helen could be the best little wage-earner on earth!" Bob echoed the words angrily, shaking himself free from Zoe's clinging arm. As he faced her at last she saw that there was unmasked horror in his expression. "We don't know where Helen is. She's disappeared. I didn't dare tell you yesterday, because I knew you'd rush off to your paper with another of those famous scoops of yours, even if you blackened our name for ever in the process! You wouldn't have cared that Helen was my sister, just so long as you hit the headlines! Look what you did to the Harrises! They're done for. All on account of your precious story! I couldn't risk having you write a story about Helen! But none of us know where she is or how to find her and bring her home again."

CHAPTER XVIII

"I MUSTN'T let him see how he's hurt me. I mustn't think of myself. I must only think about him." Zoe said the words, over and over again, to herself in the dreadful moment of silence which followed Bob's outburst. "He isn't himself. He's frantic with fear about Helen. He adores her and now he thinks something terrible has happened to her. I've got to comfort him and find her. And I was right. It wasn't just money. It was something much worse all the time."

The unspoken words steadied Zoe's nerves and cleared her head and calmed her heart. When she did speak again her voice was under complete control. She did not try to put her hand back on Bob's arm. She stood perfectly still.

"I'm sorry you distrusted me so, and that you feel I've given you cause to. Perhaps I could have helped, right away, if you'd told me. Anyway, I hope I can help now. I want to get in touch with some people I know. They're not on the paper and there won't be any leak. I swear to you that's true."

"If you're talking about the police, I've been in touch with them myself for twenty-four hours already, and through them with all the hospitals."

"I am talking partly about the police, but my approach would be different from yours. If you've actually been to headquarters I hope you were pretty guarded in what you said and where you said it. The place is always full of reporters, and the ones that are there wouldn't have the same reason I would for trying to keep things quiet. Sometimes a newspaper girl can keep things out of the paper, Bob, instead of getting them in. That's what I'm going to do if I can and if it's what you want me to do most. You've got to decide whether you primarily want this hushed up or whether you primarily want to find her. In the latter case there's the radio. In the former remember I'm certainly not ready to broadcast it yet. The headlines are all about the crash just now. That'll tend to shove everything else aside."

"It won't shove it aside for long. And I don't see yet that you can handle this one bit better than I have."

"All right. That's settled. And perhaps I can't do it any better than you. But I might do it differently. What cities besides Washington are you in touch with?"

"I'm not in touch with any other. There's no reason why I should be. She's right here in Washington somewhere. She didn't have any money to get out of it. Her clothes are all hanging in her wardrobe. Her bureau drawers are in order. Her baggage is in the basement."

"None of that proves anything. She might have got money somewhere, and she might have bought an overnight case and enough clothes to fill it."

"She'd have taken her own clothes and her own baggage if she'd have wanted to go away. But she didn't. She'd have told me if she had. She's always told me everything. She'd have asked me for money, too. I've always given her that. But nothing could have induced her to leave Dad at a time like this. She cares just as much for him as I do. She wouldn't have added to his misery."

"She may have thought that in the long run she'd lighten his burdens if he didn't have to support her. And if she had some reason for secrecy, she wouldn't have turned to you because you might have stopped her."

"But why should she have any reason for secrecy? You're crazy, Zoel!"

"It hasn't occurred to you that she might elope?"

"Elope!"

"Yes, I think she may have run away to marry Alfredo. I think she may have felt she simply couldn't wait any longer. She saw that none of us was helping her, that none of us was even trying, so perhaps she finally took matters into her own hands."

"She's not that kind of a girl. And Alfredo's not that kind of a fellow either, even if he is a Mexican. He's always leaned over backwards to do everything the most correct way."

"Yes, and where did it get him? Nowhere at all. You say 'even if he is a Mexican' now when you speak of him, and you never treated him like a civilized human being, let alone like a gentleman of the old school making an honourable proposal of marriage. You don't give him credit for any instinctive good principles or any standards of cultured conduct. You've been terribly unjust to him, and you must have hurt his feelings beyond words. Mexicans are about twice as sensitive as we are, and about twice as scrupulous when it comes to a question of how a girl like Helen ought to be treated. If anything could make him kick over the traces, the way you've all acted would have done it, especially the way your parents acted towards his parents. But personally I don't believe he's kicked over any traces. I don't believe he put Helen up to this or so much as knew she was going to do it. I think she's acted on her own initiative."

"I tell you she isn't that kind of a girl. I should think you'd have been smart enough to figure that out for yourself."

"Bob, I reckon nearly all girls are 'that kind' when they're terribly in love, and give up hope of having things come right of themselves. Helen's been sweet and patient. She's appealed to us all, in her own gentle quiet way, and we've all let her down. She thought you'd cut off your right hand to make her happy and she thought there wasn't anything on earth I couldn't accomplish. So

now she's seen her mistake, she's taken things into her own hands, as I said."

"If she was running away to get married, why didn't she leave a note saying so?"

"Because she didn't feel sure that you mightn't stop her, even at the last moment. She doesn't trust any of you as far as Alfredo's concerned, any more than you trust me as far as a story's concerned. And she's had even more reason. You know I did keep the scandal about Isabel Windsor out of the papers. But Helen didn't have any basis for confidence whatsoever."

Bob did not answer, but his silence was at least better than an angry retort. Zoe took courage from it.

"I'm not pretending I'm not worried, too, Bob, but I don't think things are as bad as you believe. I think you'll get a wire from her within twenty-four hours that'll clear everything up. Now I'm going to get you a drink, and then I'm going to do some telephoning unless you stop me bodily."

He did not stop her bodily. But neither did he appear to derive any comfort from anything she did or tried to do and she herself was obliged to admit that all her efforts were futile. But the message which she had foretold came in within the period which she had predicted. He listened incredulously while she read it back from the telephone operator who gave it to her over the wire. "ALFREDO AND I WERE MARRIED HERE IN SAN ANTONIO THIS EVENING. SORRY I HAD TO WORRY YOU. BLISSFULLY HAPPY. LOVE TO YOU ALL. LETTER FOLLOWS."

The next two days were very hard to get through. Bob was suffering from the reaction to strain and shock and could not pull himself together. Zoe knew he was sorry he had been unfair to her, but at the same time she felt he was avoiding her, that he did not want to talk to her about anything or even to have her around just yet; it was an effort for her to go on as usual. When Saturday came, Bob was most reluctant about starting for Hunter's Green. He said he did not think he should leave his father and that he was in no shape to attempt a story. But Zoe's persistence prevailed. She was able to persuade him that they had everything to gain and nothing to lose by going, and that there was not anything more they could do at the moment where they were.

"If we can get two stories out of the week-end, we can live on them for quite a while," she said practically. "We've got to look at it that way, haven't we, Bob? And I'm almost sure we can get them. I think Ronnie's right, that Candace has nabbed her man—not that I'm in a mood to tackle another marriage, any more than you are, but we have to take these things as they come. If you can

get that house and garden series going, it'll be something to fall back on for a year or more."

"I know you're right, Zoe," he said grudgingly, admitting this possibility for the first time that week. "It's just that I hate to leave Dad. But he says he wants sleep more than anything else, and I know just how he feels. He's promised to stay in bed all day Sunday, unless he finds he can help Mother with the packing and moving. Of course she thinks she must put everything on padded hangers. And it seems that Daughters were here for the fall Board Meeting and were getting ready for a Hallowe'en Frolic. They'd had their pictures taken, dressed up as jack o' lanterns and ghosts. They were going to bob for apples and look at mirrors over their shoulders. Of course, Mother wanted to be in on the fun. She didn't want to spend all her time moving. She'd had her picture taken already."

With remarkable self-control, Zoe refrained from inquiring whether her mother-in-law's eyeglasses and avoirdupois had added as much to the effect of the picture taken for the Hallowe'en party as they had to the campaign photograph taken in Colonial costume. If Bob was conscious of her forbearance, however, he did not compliment her on it. He went on talking about the elder Mortons' impending change of quarters.

"The management has been awfully decent about having them move again so soon. They've found another apartment, smaller still. Of course now that Helen's gone——"

"I told you expense was in her mind, among other things. Did they look at apartments anywhere except in the Majestic?"

"No, I don't think they did. Why?"

"Nothing. Except that there are lots of cheaper places where they could live, good ones, too. I know a couple who have a two-room suite and two meals a day at the Egyptian for a hundred and eighty dollars a month. Your mother doesn't care much about housekeeping, anyway. I should think she might enjoy an arrangement something like that. And it would cut her expense in half."

"Well, it might be worth looking into, except that I think they have their arrangements all made at the Majestic. And we've got to think of saving their pride, as much as we can. They've given up an awful lot in a mighty short while."

"I should think it might be better to save their money than their pride, with things going the way they are now. But of course it isn't any of my business."

Bob tried to be generous, to tell her that it was very much her business, that she had been a brick about everything. But he was so worn out that he could not think of any way to tell her how he felt, or when it came to that, to feel much of anything except overpowering fatigue. It was Zoe who did the driving when they went to Berryville, and Bob fell asleep on the seat beside her. She drove

slowly and cautiously until she found a good parking-place, and then she stopped the car, and sat looking out at the broad expanse of meadow and mountain before her, smoking one cigarette after another, and turning many matters over in her mind. It was nearly two hours before Bob moved, uneasily, and opened bewildered eyes, protesting, in a confused way, that she should not have let him go to sleep.

She drove on, answering without argument, and presently he stopped protesting, and dozed again. As they turned into the driveway at Hunter's Green, he roused himself long enough to say that he did not see how he could possibly keep awake through dinner.

"I wouldn't try, if I were you. You shouldn't 'exalt' yourself any more, as Pearl Gray would put it. We'll go straight up to our room, and then I'll go down again without you. Ronnie'll understand perfectly. I'll ask her to send you up a snack, but to tell Uncle Ben he'd better just set the tray outside the door. Then you can get it when you want it—if you do at all. I'll try not to disturb you when I come up. I'm beginning to see why twin beds were invented. In the morning I'll slip out for a ride early, when Ronnie goes to church. By the time I get back I think you'll be all ready for a big day."

The tray was still outside the door when she went upstairs, but she herself had carried an additional "snack," and when Bob waked from his dead sleep about two o'clock, she had Ovaltine in a thermos bottle and chicken sandwiches wrapped in oil paper, ready to offer him. He devoured them, with hardly a word, and instantly went to sleep again. When he waked the next time, and instinctively felt for her, she was not there beside him; but eventually, in the carefully shuttered light, he saw her sitting at the dressing-table, wearing her riding-habit and winding up her hair. For a few moments he lay looking at her contentedly, thinking how trim and fresh she seemed. Then he asked a lazy question.

"Are you just starting out on your ride?"

"No. I'm just back from it. I've brought up another thermos bottle, with coffee in it this time, and Ronnie's lent me a little electric stove, that plugs into a socket. I can get bacon and eggs and toast ready for you in a jiffy, and you can have your first cup of coffee in the meantime. How do you feel?"

"Grand, thanks to you. You certainly are one in a million, Zoe. Is there any news?"

"Loads. Just let me get this food started and I'll tell it to you while you eat." She busied herself briefly with culinary activities, but in an unbelievably short time brought a well-laden tray to the bed and sat down beside it. "Here's a letter I know you'll want to see first, that came special delivery about an hour ago. It was addressed to both of us, so I opened it."

"You mean we've got a letter from Helen?"

"Yes. Shall I read it aloud to you?"

"Good gosh, yes!"

"DEAREST ZOE AND BOB"—the letter began—

"I've just finished writing a long letter to Father and Mother, but I know you intended to go to Hunter's Green over this weekend, and I hope with all my heart I didn't upset your plans. So I'm writing a letter to you, too, because I want you to hear from me just as soon as the others do.

"I'm afraid I've caused everyone an awful lot of worry and trouble, and I feel terribly about that. But I just couldn't help doing what I did. I hope someday you'll understand that, even if you don't now, and that anyway you'll forgive me, because I'm so happy (except for the thought of having distressed anyone I love) that I'd hate to feel you begrudge a bit of my joy.

"It was this way: The longer I was separated from Alfredo, the surer I was that I couldn't stand being separated from him forever or even indefinitely. I worried myself, thinking how I would feel if anything happened to him, the way Ronnie had hinted; and finally I decided I'd have to put an end to our separation. I didn't act rashly, though I suppose it looked as if I did; and I'm sorry I had to act selfishly, because that was the last thing I wanted to do. But every time I tried to talk to any of you about taking me to Mexico, there was always a good reason why none of you could do it——"

"Before you interrupt yourself to say 'I told you so' I'll do it for you, Zoe. Next time I'll believe you. Now don't say 'You better!'"

"I'm not going to say anything. I'm going to read this letter to you, if you'll give me half a chance. How about some more bacon? Now listen—— 'So I decided to go by myself. At least I decided to start. I thought maybe Alfredo would meet me if I got part way. I didn't dare tell any of you what I was going to do, because I knew you would stop me, and I didn't dare write to Alfredo before I left either, because if I had he would have answered, and I have noticed that strange things have happened to letters from him sometimes. But I looked at maps and time tables and things and bought a ticket. I didn't try to pack anything, because I thought I might get caught doing that, or that the doorman at the Majestic might say he had seen me going out with hand-baggage. So I just got out of my taxi on my way to the station and got myself a fitted suitcase and a little round patent hat-box with what I needed to go in them. I went to a department store where I'd never been before so that I wouldn't be recognized. Then I caught my train all right and the first time it stopped long enough I asked the porter to send a telegram for me. I wired Alfredo and said "Can you meet me in San Antonio and marry me? Please answer care of Pullman ticket

office, Union Station, St. Louis, addressing message to Miss Sadie Jones.””

“Good glory grief! And I kept telling you Helen wasn’t that kind of a girl! What kind of a girl are you, Zoe? Have you been pulling the wool over my eyes, too?”

“Maybe you’ll keep them a little wider open, after this. Suppose you listen to the solution of the financial problem now. It won’t please you, but at least it’s another symptom of resourcefulness—— ‘I suppose you’re wondering how I got the money to do all this. At first I thought I’d go in a day coach, and not buy any baggage or any clothes, and I had just about enough money in my savings bank account to get a one-way coach ticket to San Antonio. But I thought that over, too. I thought I would be terribly dirty and terribly tired when I got to Texas, if I did that, and I also thought one of you might find out if I took money from the bank. So I decided not to do that either. I decided to borrow what I needed. I didn’t think I would have any trouble doing this. I thought Giles would lend it to me and he did.’”

“Re-enter the heavy, his pockets lined with gold!”

“Of course I knew Giles was staying in the apartment next to ours. I had met him several times going in and out and had stopped and spoken to him. He has always been very kind to me, and somehow I did not see any reason why he and I could not go on being friends, though I know there is some sort of a strain between him and the rest of you, without knowing what or why. And one day when I met him and there was absolutely no one else in sight along the corridor, I asked him if he would let me come into his apartment and talk to him for a few minutes. He had never asked me in of his own accord, which seemed to me strange, but he was perfectly pleasant when I asked him. He said he would be very glad to have me. And after we were comfortably seated in the living-room, he wanted to know what he could do for me. Apparently he guessed that I wanted him to do something, that this wasn’t just a social call. So I said, if he were willing, and it wouldn’t inconvenience him, he could lend me two hundred dollars, but that he must consider the loan and our conversation both strictly confidential. He said that it was perfectly convenient and that he was very much touched because I had thought of him and that of course he wouldn’t breathe a word to a soul. While he was talking he took a wallet and handed me some bills. He said he thought I’d better have an extra hundred while I was about it. And I was very glad he suggested it because in this way I was able to get all that I really needed in the way of clothes after I had bought my ticket and paid for my reservations.

“Alfredo sent me a very complete telegram. He wired: “OVERWHELMED WITH JOY. LEAVING FOR SAN ANTONIO IMMEDIATELY. HOPE TO REACH THERE BEFORE YOU DO AND MEET YOU AT TRAIN BUT IN CASE

OF DELAY HAVE WIRED ARCHBISHOP TO HAVE YOU MET. BUT SHOULD THERE BE ANY SLIP-UP GO TO HOTEL MENCER AND AWAIT MY ARRIVAL. I ADORE YOU." Of course I didn't understand why he should have chosen the Archbishop to meet me, not knowing much about archbishops, but I did know it was all right if Alfredo said so, and by and by I found out that the Archbishop of San Antonio is an old friend of the Archbishop of Mexico, who is a close relative of the Terrazas. But there was no slip-up at all, for Alfredo met me himself, which, of course, was wonderful. Usually the Mexican trains are late and the Katy is on time, but on this trip it was the other way around because there had been wash-outs on the road in Missouri. I would've been very impatient if I had not kept getting more telegrams every few hours from Alfredo, all very affectionate and reassuring. He wired me all along the way, so that I knew he was getting further and further North while I was getting further and further South, and when the train drew in at the Katy station, there he was!

"He explained to me that he had already got the license from the County Clerk and that the Archbishop would marry us immediately unless for any reason I would rather wait. Of course there wasn't the slightest reason why I should want to wait, or I wouldn't have started in the first place. So Alfredo took me straight to the Archiepiscopal Residence, which impressed me very much indeed. It is a large square house made of grey stone and trimmed with little frilly balconies, and it looms up at the back of a lawn which has palms and pomegranates planted in it. The front door is made of black walnut and inside at the left there is a parlour with rather stiff Victorian furniture in it. The priest who opened the door and showed us into this parlour was rather stiff, too. But before there was time for either the priest or the parlour to depress me, the good old Archbishop came to the top of the stairs, and called "Come up here, my children! I am awaiting you!" He put me at my ease at once, patting my hand and telling me he was pleased to see that I was wearing blue and white because those are the Virgin's colours. Of course I had not known they were the Virgin's colours, but they had seemed suitable for the kind of wedding I was going to have, and my hat had a little veil on it and Alfredo had brought me a beautiful bouquet, so I did not mind in the least not having white satin and a train like Veronique and Zoe.

"The Archbishop married us upstairs in his study, which is a rather bare-looking room with a big table and a roll-top desk in it. but we did not care how it looked, especially as he was so kind and understanding. After the ceremony, which was very short and simple, he took us down to the dining-room in the rear, overlooking a lovely garden with oleanders and magnolias growing around a fountain. He offered us some sweet wine and some little cakes, because he said of course we ought to have some sort of a feast, and

afterwards he blessed us again before we went away. Then Alfredo brought me to the Menger himself. He had reserved the bridal suite, which it seems is very famous all over the South, and which the management had decorated with beautiful white flowers, according to its custom when entertaining a bride and groom. The suite has an iron balcony looking out on the Alamo Plaza, where it is great fun to sit, and a big parlour leading into an alcove bedroom through a graceful arch, and though the furniture here is Victorian, too, it is the nice comfortable substantial kind. We had our bridal supper served in this suite, all the specialities for which the hotel is noted, like turtle soup and fried chicken and pompano and mint juleps in silver goblets, and everything was delicious and perfect.

“All sorts of renowned persons have stayed here, like Lee and Grant and Theodore Roosevelt, and we were allowed to see their names on the register when we signed our own names. The whole hotel is very interesting. It has lots of wrought-iron balconies, and a bar that is copied from the one in the House of Lords Club, and oil paintings and tall pillars in the lobby. The dining-room is cool and high and white, and there is a beautiful patio, too, and the coloured servants are all very dignified and attentive. In fact, everything is so ideal that Alfredo thinks we had better stay on for a few days before we go to Mexico, so that I can get rested and see the sights and buy some more clothes. There is a very good shop called Joske's right beside the hotel, and lots of wonderful things to see—the Alamo and the Governor's Palace and the Missions and I don't know what besides, because of course we haven't had time to start yet, much less to finish. But Alfredo has told me. And he laughs at me a little because I had the idea we must hurry up and get over the border so that no one could take me away from him, for he says no one can do that now that we are married, since it is against the law to try to separate husbands and wives.

“Alfredo also laughs at me when I ask him how he can afford to spend so much money, which I keep doing, because of course I know this hotel must be very expensive and he is constantly spending money on other expensive things besides. My wedding-ring is a band of diamonds set in platinum, and the diamonds are good-sized and go all the way around; and Alfredo also had several other rings for me to choose between, for he said I must not be cheated out of an engagement ring simply because we had never been formally engaged. The one I have chosen has a large pearl in the centre with a large diamond on either side of it, and these are all surrounded by small diamonds. It goes beautifully with diamond and pearl earrings and necklace which Alfredo has given me for a wedding present. He wants me to get two fur coats while we are here, mink for daytime and ermine for evening, because it may already be cold by the time we get to Mexico City, which, by the way, he

says I mustn't call that, but just Mexico. We are not going directly to Mexico (City) from here because we are going to spend several weeks at the Terrazas' hacienda in the country. But after we are settled in town, I hope, and he does too, that you will all come to visit us. I asked him if he were sure there would be room, for I remembered he had said before that we would have to live with his family. But he only laughed again, and told me to wait and see. You must not think it hurts my feelings when he laughs at me. I love to hear him. It is the nicest sort of laugh I ever heard, and at the end of every laugh he kisses me, and of course that is the best of all.

"So I don't believe the house where he lives is very small after all or that he and I and the rest of the family will be much in each other's way. And I think everyone in Washington must have been mistaken into supposing that he was not well off. He has given me a thousand dollars for 'immediate incidentals,' so I have already repaid Giles' loan, and now I am wondering what to do with the rest of the thousand, though Alfredo seems to take it for granted that I will spend it before we leave San Antonio. I don't see how I can, because he has arranged to have all our purchases charged to our hotel bill, so I have asked Mother and Father, in my letter to them, if they would not let me send five hundred as a gift, because I know how worried they are just now, and that would help out a little, wouldn't it? I shall be able to send a great deal more later on, if they will take it, for Alfredo is making arrangements to settle half a million on me, in order that I will never be financially embarrassed, as he says, and though I think this must be some sort of joke, too, he insists that it isn't. He says all this money is to be in a private fund of my own, to use in any way and at any time I want to, so I can send sums home as they are needed, and I shall depend on both of you to let me know when they are.

"Give my love to Ronnie and Welby, especially Ronnie, and tell her I can't thank her enough for the advice she gave me last spring. One of the other things Alfredo laughs about is my feeling that Mexico is a dangerous place. He says the so-called revolutions featured in the American yellow press really do not amount to anything, and that it is very rare anyone gets hurt, much less killed, in them. But he says he is glad I thought they were serious, as otherwise I might not have been frightened into marrying him, and whatever he says, I'm glad I did exactly what Ronnie told me to. I just got on a train and went to Alfredo and married him before night. It was all perfectly simple and yet perfectly splendid, too. I don't suppose any of you thought to ask her what had become of me. And I'm glad you didn't, because she'd have been able to tell you.

"As ever your devoted sister,

"ELENA MORTON DE TERRAZA."

Zoe folded the letter slowly and replaced it in its envelope. Then she looked up and met Bob's eyes. For a minute neither of them said anything, then they both burst out laughing.

"Love's young dream, on a bed of roses," Bob said at last, "with the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow thrown in for good measure. Well, that's that. I'll know enough never to worry about a guileless girl again. Now let's get around to ourselves. I'm full of food. Do take away this tray, so I can move, and set it out in the hall, so that Uncle Ben won't come barging in here after it. Then come on back here. I want to take a good look at you. You look wonderful to me. But you look better still when you're not in boys' clothes. You're not going to ride any more today, are you? Why not take off those togs and lie down for a while? I know I must look lousy to you. I know I need a shave and a bath and all that. But I can't wait to hear the rest of your news and I want to kiss and make up—for all the time we've lost these last few days because I've been such a fool. I can still count on you not to let me down, can't I, Zoe?"

After Helen's letter, the rest of Zoe's news was inevitably something of an anticlimax. Senator Morton had telephoned to report, with incredulous delight and relief, on his own letter; he had suggested that Bob and Zoe should stay on for an extra day or so at Hunter's Green, since they had been delayed in starting, and since Mr. Ruthven had already said he thought they had better remain there until they had their story or stories. Zoe hoped Bob would fall in with this plan. Surely his father could get along till Wednesday without him now that everything had taken such an upward turn. And Candace was really getting married the next day—in the garden if the Indian summer weather held; in the double drawing-room if it did not. Welby was going to give his mother away; he was not in the least sensitive any more about appearing before a sizable gathering in his wheel-chair. Father Flynn would officiate. The bridal couple were sailing at once on the *Conte di Savoia*, so that they could spend the remainder of the autumn in Italy, where Candace would make the acquaintance of the titled family which she had so triumphantly succeeded in annexing. No formal wedding invitations had been sent out, but the bride-to-be had been busy, the last day or two, telephoning her friends and dashing off little notes, telling them to "drop in at five on Monday." She had not said what for, but the reason was an open secret by now. Zoe had called the *Examiner* the night before, while Bob was still asleep, to tell Brenda how matters stood at Hunter's Green, and, with Senator Morton's approval, she had also, that morning, given out the news of Helen's marriage. She was to call up again the next morning to supply Brenda with further details, but she had nothing to do the rest of that day but go over the ground with

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Bob and see if she could be of any help as a collaborator for his piece.

"I don't know whether I can write about anything except secret and sudden marriages; I haven't anything else on my mind."

"Then you ought to be in exactly the right mood to begin your story with the tender tale of Althea Bainbridge and Ronald Hunter. Come on, Bob, we've simply got to get up. It's almost dinner-time, and the mint juleps will all be guzzled down before we get to the terrace."

On Sundays dinner at Hunter's Green was at two in the afternoon instead of at seven in the evening, as it was on weekdays; and Ronnie had explained that, because of this, Isabel always joined the family earlier on Sundays than she did at other times. She was already sitting on the terrace with Welby and Ronnie, Candace and Vittorio, when Bob and Zoe went down. Since the others all naturally congregated in couples, she looked a little out of the picture; and as if Ronnie were aware of her guest's resentment over such an arrangement, she slipped quietly away while the others were pre-occupied with their juleps, and telephoned to Dabney Turberville. Was he by any miracle free for dinner, she inquired? Because she needed an extra man in the worst way. He had a guest himself, Dabney replied, who had just arrived from England. If Ronnie didn't mind having two extra men instead of one, or if she'd trust him to pick up another lovely lady along the way, he'd be right over. She trusted him absolutely, though no doubt mistakenly, she said, laughing, and as far as the other extra man was concerned, she had an idea that two were always better than one, in Isabel Windsor's opinion.

"I've ordered another round of juleps; Dabney Turberville is dropping in for dinner, but he may be a little late," Ronnie announced casually, when she went back to the terrace. "He's bringing an English friend with him, Guy Grenville. Wasn't it at the Grenvilles' place that you and Helen stayed in England last summer, Isabel?"

"Of course it was! Why, I had no idea that Guy Grenville was in this country! Has he come on some special mission?"

"Dabney didn't say. Perhaps they just want to have some hunting together. They used to hunt together all the time, in England, when they were boys."

The answer appeared to be unconvincing, or at least unsatisfactory, to Isabel; but, as Ronnie had confided to Zoe the night before in the course of a quiet conversation they had enjoyed alone, Isabel seemed to be getting more and more moody all the time. Her habitually sweet speech was stabbed with little daggers of satire; she was restless instead of reposeful; she seemed to have a grudge and a grievance. Ronnie had asked Zoe if she knew how to account for it.

"All sorts of ways. In the first place, all Isabel's summer plans went badly awry. You put ideas into her head, didn't you, as well as into Helen's? In Isabel's case they didn't work out so well."

"I don't know what you mean, Zoe."

"Well, let's forget it. My hunch may be all wrong. And I know you didn't mean to make trouble. Besides, I don't think she's finding the autumn an overwhelming success, either. She's probably having financial troubles, like everyone else. If Stephen Windsor lost his money, the lid certainly would be off."

"Stephen Windsor! Why, he's a multi-millionaire!"

"He was, up to October fifth. I don't know what he is now besides a drunk. Have you been following the stock market lately, Ronnie?"

"Not closely. It isn't as if it meant anything to me personally. You see, it won't for another year."

"And will it then?"

"Why yes. Because then I'll be twenty-one. Then I'll have my own money."

"What's your money invested in, Ronnie?"

"All sorts of nice safe things. It's handled by a trust. Zoe—you don't think anything could *happen* to my money, do you? Before I ever get it?"

Zoe's throat had suddenly felt very dry. It became difficult for her to speak quietly or even to speak at all. But she did her best.

"No, I don't suppose so. I suppose it must be safeguarded in every way. But it wouldn't be a bad plan for you to get in touch with your trustee. Because there have been several bad breaks. I told you how hard hit poor Senator Morton had been."

"Yes, but I hadn't thought that could possibly affect me. Why, Zoe, you know how I've had to struggle and scheme to keep things going here, to save this place for Welby and Bennie! I can see my way now to manage for another year. But I don't know what I'd do after that if I didn't have anything more to draw on."

"Well, probably you will have, Ronnie. I do know what a fight you've put up. There wouldn't be any justice at all if you lost out now. But as far as Stephen Windsor's concerned—His money is handled by a trust, too, isn't it? He hasn't been responsible for years. You don't know what his investments are either, do you?"

Ronnie did not know, and after a few minutes they stopped talking about finances and went on to other subjects. Later, her excitement over Helen's letter and her preoccupation with Bob's exhaustion had driven all but intermittent thoughts of the stock market from Zoe's mind, and when she did think of it, she hoped that Ronnie had forgotten it. Now, as she sat on the terrace, contentedly sipping her mint julep and covertly watching Isabel, she decided that again she had had a good hunch. In spite of the way

Isabel had brightened at the prospect of male company, there was a nervousness about her expression and her movements which was absolutely alien to her customary poise. The debacle of her affair with Giles could easily account for some of it. Zoe understood better than she had a few months before both the havoc an emotional upheaval could work in a woman and the supreme store she might set upon happy and harmonious union. But she did not believe that there had ever been a sacrificial side to any act of Isabel's, or that Isabel had ever understood that there must be to make life complete. Her feeling for Giles, if it could be called love at all, was both selfish and sensual, but it was neither strong nor deep; and so far as her unfortunate husband was concerned, she had apparently never had any feeling but loathing and greed. Something besides unsatisfied longing was responsible for her present agitation, and Zoe, regarding her with ever-increasing attention, became more and more sure that it was a desperate anxiety about money. Luxury, not love, was the mainspring of Isabel's life. If that were jeopardized or forfeited, she would be lost indeed.

Her expression changed as the two extra guests came out on the terrace. At their approach her unsurpassable charm reasserted itself, and her greeting to Guy was warm as well as gracious. He answered her with formal but complete courtesy, and sat beside her for a few moments, listening rather than responding to her amiable small-talk and adroitly evading her well-put questions concerning the purpose of his visit to America. When Ronnie achieved a skilful shifting about of guests by the interpolation of Bennie on the scene, Isabel found that Dabney instead of Guy was next to her; and, displaying some adroitness herself, she managed to listen to most of what Guy and Bob were saying to each other, while apparently lending an attentive as well as a beautiful ear to the Master of Fox Hounds.

"I've been wanting very much to meet you, Mr. Morton. My mother and I enjoyed the visit your sister made us no end."

"She wrote me how good you'd both been to her. We all appreciated it. I hope we'll see something of you if you're planning to be in Washington at all."

"Oh, rather. Turberville won't be able to keep me in monastic seclusion all the time, the way he lives, or even out following hounds day after day. I'll be looking you and your wife up, if I may, very soon. The Senator and Mrs. Morton too. But what's this I hear about your sister being out of town?"

"She decided rather suddenly to get married. She's in San Antonio at the moment. But she's leaving for Mexico almost immediately, to spend the rest of her honeymoon there."

"But, I say, it *was* very sudden, wasn't it? She told me she was interested, don't you know, in a young Mexican diplomat. She and

I had some very jolly talks together in an arbour beside a little lake we've got at Star Hundred, and grew quite confidential. But I shouldn't have expected she'd decide to get married quickly like that. She didn't strike me as that kind of a girl. That is, she's rather shy and so on, if you know what I mean."

"You'd better come and talk to my wife. She'll put you in your place. I tried to tell her myself that Helen wasn't 'that kind of a girl.' Now she's laughing up her sleeve at me."

Guy Grenville seemed to be very glad indeed to talk to Zoe. Isabel, still taking in the progress of events, could not help seeing that Zoe made an impression on the Englishman which was as favourable as it was immediate. Ronnie saw this too, and placed him beside Zoe when they went in to dinner; and Dabney, without any conversation whatsoever on the subject, quietly slipped into the seat beside Ronnie, as if it were his accustomed one. Isabel was left between Welby, whom she saw every day and whose helplessness was repugnant to her, and Bob, who had always seemed to her provincial and inconsequential. The meal, of which all the others partook gaily, was dull and dreary for her. Welby tried to talk to her, but she turned away from him; Bob, when she had snubbed him once or twice, did not even try.

The rest of the afternoon passed off no better. Isabel's spirits rose, briefly, when Zoe announced that she and Bob had work to do; her hot feeling of resentment against Zoe, which had flared up in Paris, was beginning to stir again, and she longed for the girl's removal from the scene, which she felt would be improved by her absence. But soon Candace and Vittorio wandered off in the garden, like a couple of "silly school children," as Isabel said to herself; and when Ronnie remarked that it was time for Welby and Bennie to take the joint nap which was still part of their daily programme, Dabney rose at once with a most unwelcome suggestion.

"I'm sure you want to rest too, Mrs. Windsor. This unseasonable heat is exhausting, isn't it? Don't forget you had a bad breakdown last summer. Come along, Guy, we mustn't detain Mrs. Windsor. Besides, I want to show you what Ronnie and Welby are doing with their stables. You'll join us there, won't you, Ronnie, after you get your menfolk settled down?"

"Yes, I'll be out in about half an hour. So long."

There was nothing about the unseasonable heat that was conducive to slumber, as far as Isabel was concerned. She was far too indignant to be drowsy. It was unjust as well as illogical that she should be shunted off alone to her room, while a frowsy woman, ten years her senior, wandered through the gardens with a titled suitor, and two raw girls, one of them with no background whatsoever and the other most precariously placed in "good society," should be surfeited with masculine attention. She had flattered herself that she had "got even" with Zoe Wing for presuming to

block her way, that she had put the red-headed reporter in her place and taught her a crushing lesson; and here was Zoe triumphantly married to a senator's son, who might be something of a braggart and something of a bully, but who was obviously madly in love with her, and who, moreover, had obviously succeeded somehow in making her madly in love with him. Their feeling for each other was like a flashing force, radiating in all directions, and Zoe, herself both the cause and the core of this, had relegated every phase of her life which it had not touched into oblivion. The reason she had not married Giles Arnold was because Robert Morton had more to offer her, from her point of view; and now that she was in full possession of his love, she had robbed Isabel of the fruits of jealousy and revenge. The very sight of Zoe, the very thought of her, roused Isabel to rage.

Towards Veronique Isabel had hitherto felt less hostility. She could afford to indulge in mild pity towards a girl of twenty tied for life to an impotent paralytic, and further saddled with debts and drudgery. But Veronique seemed to be taking the debts and the drudgery in her stride, and to be unaccountably attached to her worthless hulk of a husband; there was no satisfaction in sympathizing with a person who either would not or could not recognize the need of sympathy. And evidently, Isabel said to herself venomously, Ronnie had her consolations; here was Dabney Turberville, the greatest catch of the countryside, feeding out of her hand and tagging around at her heels. Isabel thought that perhaps she had better say a word to Welby about the way it looked. Only she had an uncomfortable feeling that Welby would no more brook disparagement of Veronique than Bob would brook interference with Zoe. . . .

Her shaded room should have given her rest, her big four-poster should have afforded her comfort; but Isabel lay with open eyes, tossing and turning, her thoughts unwillingly reverting to the dreadful dinner at which she had been so slighted a guest. Ordinarily, the image of Guy Grenville would have supplied some satisfaction; he was not hideously crippled like Welby, or brazenly infatuated like Bob, or insolently self-confident like Dabney; but somehow he had remained detached, and in spite of his coolness and courtesy, he created an impression of vague disappointment. Was it possible he was seriously interested in such an unstimulating little nonentity as Helen, and that he had crossed the ocean with a more or less definite idea of courting her? Such a course seemed beyond the realm of credulity; and yet, even as Isabel told herself this, she remembered the reason that Helen was out of Guy Grenville's distinguished reach. The shy, spiritless little girl whom she had dismissed as negligible had summoned the courage to make a runaway match, not with another nonentity, but with a very attractive and wealthy young man, on whose unswerving devotion she

had confidently counted and who had been proud to proclaim to the world that her trustfulness was not misplaced.

Isabel sat up in bed, smothering an exclamation of annoyance, and swung her feet over the edge. Sarah had placed her satin mules neatly beside it, and Isabel slid gracefully down from the immense height of the antique four-poster, without using the steps, and thrust her small white feet into the waiting slippers. Since she could not sleep, or even rest, and since there was nothing else on earth to do, she supposed she might as well try to answer that horrid letter from the superintendent of the sanitarium in New Jersey where Stephen was still staying. Several letters had come to her from the same source during the summer, but, being otherwise preoccupied, she had not paid much attention to them. She felt sure that Doctor Matthews—was that the troublesome man's name?—must be exaggerating when he said that Mr. Windsor did not seem to be as well as usual that summer. Doctor Matthews had kept harping on this. "He is in a very nervous state. We have been obliged to administer opiates." Well, in Heaven's name, what were opiates *for* if not to administer to a man like Stephen? "Mr. Windsor seems more and more excitable. I have felt it best to call in Doctor T. D. Berger, the well-known alienist, in consultation. He agrees with me that if Mr. Windsor's condition does not improve it may be necessary for us to ask you to meet with us here." Isabel shrank from sanitariums of all kinds, even those whose true purpose was concealed with such costly camouflage as the one where Stephen spent his summers. She had entirely disregarded Doctor Matthews' first hint, and then she had received another letter, much more peremptory in tone. "I must remind you that it is not our practice to attempt to treat any form of mental derangement here, except such temporary attacks as are unfortunately an intermittent part of a general condition and an habitual weakness such as those from which Mr. Windsor is suffering. This past summer, in spite of all our efforts, these attacks have come closer and closer together, and they have increased in violence as well as frequency. I must therefore ask you to consider, very carefully, what you would like the next step in your husband's treatment to be, and I must again most urgently request you to meet with Doctor Berger and myself in order that we may map out ways and means."

All these letters Isabel had somehow succeeded in disregarding. Now another had come in, by special delivery. "Through the unfortunate oversight of an attendant, a newspaper containing the startling news of the first stock market crash fell into Mr. Windsor's hands. He had hardly read it when he was seized with one of those violent attacks which we now have so much reason to dread. The collapse of the market was evidently a great shock to him. Since then, he has insisted on reading the reports every day; any attempt to keep them from him has brought about a return of the seizure,

in still more devastating form. I fear that he has suffered very great financial reverses, and that the thought of these is preying on his already disordered mind and still further deranging it. Of course, we all hoped that Tuesday's slump might mark the end of the abnormal market conditions, since there was such a strong rally at the end of the afternoon. But today's reports are less encouraging; as you must know, many accounts have been entirely wiped out. If you have not already done so, I suggest that you get in touch immediately with your confidential financial adviser, and also with your family physician. If you would care to have either or both of them accompany you on your visit here, I assure you they would be more than welcome. But I must decline to accept responsibility for Mr. Windsor after November first, and I must insist that you come here on or before that date to authorize his removal elsewhere."

"The first of November isn't until Thursday; there's plenty of time," Isabel said to herself, tossing the irritating letter aside again. "I can't do anything tomorrow. No one could be so unreasonable as to expect me to do that, when everything will be in a state of upheaval on account of the wedding. But I can telephone Doctor Dinsmore on Tuesday, if I'm not too tired. He's always so soothing and considerate—he doesn't go off at half-cock like this Matthews man. I've always heard that physicians who stayed among inebriates and nervous wrecks too long get queer themselves, and I'm beginning to believe it. I suppose I can telephone that old fogey Ellison too, though I hate to give him the satisfaction. His letter was just as irritating in one way as Matthews' was in another. But perhaps I'd better read it again, while I'm going in for this sort of thing. I must have left it around here somewhere."

Mr. T. Davis Ellison, first Vice-President of the Bragg Bank, was the confidential adviser to whom Doctor Matthews had referred. Mr. Ellison, who had had long, and occasionally bitter, experience in breaking unpleasant financial truths to lovely ladies accustomed to being lapped in luxury, would have felt deeply grieved if he had known that Isabel had resented and neglected his letter. Personally he had prided himself that he had written with urgency tempered by tact. He felt impelled to tell her—so he had said—that her income, for the moment, might be somewhat reduced. As she had doubtless gathered from the public prints—Mr. Ellison especially liked to refer to newspapers as the public prints—there had been slight disturbances in the stock market of late, and some of her husband's holdings had been affected by these disturbances. He did not wish to alarm her. But he felt it would be wise for her to consider ways and means of painless retrenchment, and when she had done so, perhaps she would come in for a little chat. They could then decide whether she would rather let her house or reduce her household staff or take some other measures. Several of

his clients were thinking of returning to Europe for the winter. Now that the off-season rates were in force, passage was very reasonable on the slower boats, and the cost of living in the smaller cities along the Riviera was still negligible. He knew that she had always enjoyed Europe; and since he had heard from Doctor Matthews that Mr. Windsor was in no condition to return to Washington, that he must indeed be transferred to another sanitarium for another form of treatment, that might be the best solution for her. Mr. Windsor's expenses would inevitably be heavy. If hers could be correspondingly light, that would make everything easier all round. He knew he could count on her co-operation in a temporary emergency. He could assure her that the present so-called crisis was nothing more than that; and he was, as always, most faithfully hers . . .

"The old fogey!" Isabel said again, tossing Mr. Ellison's letter aside too. "As if I wanted to go back to Europe when I've just come from there! As if I'd let tenants overrun my nice house and destroy all my lovely things! And as if I could run it with fewer servants! It can't be done. If Mr. Ellison knew anything at all about running an establishment, he'd realize that! And why on earth should I scrimp and save so that Stephen can have every luxury? If he's in half as bad a state as Matthews says he is, he won't know the difference between one sort of treatment and another!"

Her annoyance grew steadily worse as her thoughts went round and round in a vicious circle. And, like the forking flame of a small snake's tongue, an idea alien to the others kept darting in and out among them. If she had only consented to a divorce, Giles would have taken her away from all this trouble. It would have been much better to go to Guantanamo, or whatever God-forsaken place it was to which he was going, than to stay in Washington and face the upheaval to which everything pointed. She thought that perhaps—just perhaps—she had better telephone Giles on Tuesday also and tell him that she had changed her mind. Because it was one thing to have Stephen in the house with her, in charge of a capable attendant; though invisible to the world at large, his presence was taken for granted, and the fiction that he had "given out" at the last moment, as far as parties were concerned, was still carefully observed. All invitations were addressed to both of them, and official hostesses, from the President's wife down, pretended to be politely surprised when Stephen's last-minute regrets were telephoned. If he remained in a distant sanitarium, the news of his absence would sooner or later leak out; she herself would no longer be a power behind the throne; she would become simply an "extra woman," invited only to the dulllest dinners and the large luncheons at which cackling women paid off their so-called social debts, at one killing, to other cackling women. She would be asked to the really

important parties only when she herself was needed to fill in, unless she could carry everything off with a lavish hand. The "extra women" who scattered money around did get asked—well, not to the most important parties, but after all to some very nice ones. With money, and the legend she had built up around herself, she could still manage without Stephen. But here was Ellison telling her that there was no more money—at least, not to speak of. . . .

Someone was knocking at the door. Mechanically Isabel said "Come in!" before she remembered that it was part of the picture to do so very graciously. Then she was appalled to see that her unexpected visitor was Zoe Wing.

Zoe came across the room easily and quietly. She moved fast, without giving the impression of haste. She was extremely well dressed, and the effect which she produced was smart, alert and self-confident. Isabel saw that she was not as skinny as she had been; her slenderness was still noticeable and enviable, but there were certain contours. . . . Isabel was glad Giles Arnold could not see Zoe wearing that revealing dress, and walking freely and proudly, with the evening light falling on her red hair. She was more than ever like a flame, too vital to leave any man at rest. What was it Giles himself had said? That the very name Zoe meant life.

"Good evening," Zoe said equably. "I hope I haven't disturbed you. Ronnie asked me if I'd come and see whether there was anything you'd like. The servants all have the afternoon off, as they usually do on Sunday. And Ronnie has gone out with Dabney Turberville and Guy Grenville."

"Leaving her poor helpless husband all alone?"

"Oh no! I realize it would be a shock to you to hear that anyone would do that. But haven't you heard? They've found a way of putting Welby's wheel-chair into a station wagon. He's getting to quite a few places now. In the spring he'll be beginning to go to the races again. They take Bennie along too. Bennie goes to sleep almost anywhere, after he's through howling for food. I suppose when Ronnie stops nursing him it won't be quite so simple to cart him around. But it doesn't amount to anything now."

"I should think she'd be glad enough to leave that brat behind, especially when she goes to Dabney Turberville's."

"Oh no!" Zoe said again, in the same pleasant tone of voice. "She never wants Bennie out of her sight, any more than she ever wants Welby out of her sight. She's crazy on the subject of babies. She's sorry for everybody who hasn't got one. She's told me so dozens of times. Didn't she ever tell you so?"

"I don't remember. Yes, I believe she did say something of the sort to me once."

Isabel's fury against Zoe was mounting fast. Not that Zoe had actually said anything provocative. Indeed, for the moment, she

did not say anything. She looked at Isabel, full in the face, and then she glanced away, with a quizzical little smile that gave Isabel the feeling there was nothing about herself Zoe did not know, or at least guess. The feeling was so strong that it was on the tip of her tongue to say, "Miss Wing, if you've come here to insult me——" Fortunately she stopped before she had said anything more than "Miss Wing." But again she knew Zoe had been aware of everything that was in her mind.

"Well, I don't mind admitting she has mentioned it to me," Zoe remarked casually. "But I didn't mean to enlarge on that subject. I was just talking at random. I came in because Ronnie asked me to, as I said, and because I hadn't anything else to do at the moment. Sunday afternoons do drag a little in the country, don't they? By the way, you wouldn't mind calling me Mrs. Morton instead of Miss Wing, would you? Not that I care, but Bob prefers it, socially speaking. Of course, I'm keeping Zoe Wing for by-lines."

"But you seem so much a part of your by-lines. It's hard for me to think of you as being married."

"Is it? Oh, but you'll get used to the idea very quickly. At least I have. I think it's wonderful to be married. I'm quite lost without Bob. He's working on his piece just now and doesn't want to be bothered with me."

"I shouldn't have supposed he could bear to be separated from you."

"Oh yes, he can. He likes to be separated from me. And then he likes to be reunited with me. Of course, the reunions are fairly close together. But he's a lone wolf, when it comes to work. Me, I can think faster when I'm facing a deadline and better when I'm in the midst of an uproar. It spurs me on, just as a fight does. But Bob's got to have quiet and solitude to compose. I'm out to see that he gets it. I want him to have everything he wants."

"I understand just how you feel," Isabel said sweetly.

"I'm sure you do. And I'm so glad to have this good chance, Mrs. Windsor, of telling you I understand just how you feel, too. I've been silent as the grave, though. Even under the most rigid form of third-degree questioning. The *Examiner* was very annoyed with me. But you can count on my discretion, Mrs. Windsor, absolutely, whatever you do. Even if you decide Giles is your best bet after all, I'll never tell all. That is, not quite all. Are you sure there isn't anything else I can do for you? Well, then, so long, as Ronnie says. I'll look in on Bob now and see how the piece is coming along. I think he must have got through with the lovers by now and be getting to the ghosts. Anyhow, I want to find out. And then I have to write my own piece about the wedding. Gosh, it was fun in France, not writing about things until after they happened. Lots of things were fun in France, weren't they?"

The dreadful girl was gone, easily and provocatively, as she had come; but Isabel continued to writhe all night at the memory of her manner and of her words; and the next day brought no solace with it. The household was astir with preparations for the wedding, and the shifting limelight played on Candace now. Her hearty laugh, her resonant voice, rang vibrantly through the house all the morning. She was in the highest spirits, and her exuberance became her full-blown beauty. She made an arrestingly handsome bride, and her last-minute idea of having Ronnie and Zoe act as her attendants was a very happy one. Ronnie had had no new clothes for a long time; but Zoe had bought two dresses, copied from the same model, in different shades of green, because these had both suited her so well that she could not choose between them; with a little adjusting, Ronnie was able to wear the brighter of the two and Zoe wore the pale one. The two girls were almost exactly the same height. With hats and ornaments and bouquets to match, they made a striking pair. The fine weather held, and the garden, still bright with cosmos and chrysanthemums in full bloom, made a perfect setting for the ceremony. Inside, the massive mahogany groaned under the flowing bowls and towering cakes that were set forth. The guests arrived from far and wide, and all were seemingly in spirits to match the bride's.

All Candace's former beaux had turned out in full force; but far from looking downcast at her desertion, they behaved as if it were a great joke. Jett Dabney and Stewart Bainbridge kept telling Veronique that they were counting on her to maintain the traditional hospitality of Hunter's Green, and she kept retorting that she had never expected a mere marriage would get them out from under foot; at which their roars redoubled.

Nobody spoke of the stock market. Nobody spoke of retrenchment or disease or disaster. Almost everyone was a little high. Everyone, whether high or not, was unaffectedly happy and hilarious. Bennie was passed from one to another, tossed high in the air, ridden on jerking knees; he crowed and laughed with increasing merriment as the afternoon wore on. Isabel thought so much guffawing, so much indiscriminate kissing and drinking, was very vulgar. But nobody cared what Isabel thought. She was again an alien and an outsider.

She went to bed exhausted and dispirited, the telephone calls which she was to make in the morning weighing on her mind, and when she finally went to sleep she dreamed frightfully. She thought Zoe was back in her room, saying all the things that had been left unsaid when she really was there. This was horrible, and it went on and on. At last Isabel tried to stay awake, because she could not stand dreaming about Zoe any more. But when she stayed awake she heard strange noises. What was that ghost story Ronnie had told in the spring about the hunter who climbed

slowly up the stairs, and dropped one boot after the other on a resounding floor? The apparition was seen and heard prior to disaster, and now Isabel was sure that she had heard him, and unsure that she had not seen him, too. She lay shivering until daylight filtered into the room and the time came when she could get up.

She had decided to call Giles first. Until the last moment she had cherished a hope that Candace might invite him to the wedding; but Candace, when Isabel had finally mentioned the matter to her, made a wry face and said she had learned better than to throw monkey-wrenches into matrimonial works. It appeared she was not considering Isabel at all; she was considering Zoe, in whose connection she now thought of Giles. So there was nothing for Isabel to do but to shout over a public wire what she had pictured herself as whispering in some secluded nook. And there were so few branch telephones at Hunter's Green, none on her side of the house. She had to wait until the gun-room, still littered with the remains of the bridal feast, had been cleared out, and the tired but good-natured servants had gone to attack the chaos in the double drawing-room. Then she closed the door, picked up the telephone receiver, and gave the toll operator Giles' number. There was a long wait, some confusion and some difficulty. Isabel had never thought highly of the telephone system in rural Virginia, and her present experience did not tend to raise her opinion. She got no answer on her call, though she waited a long time to get the private wire in the apartment where Giles was staying. Finally, in desperation, she asked for the number of the Majestic Hotel, and spoke to the girl at the switchboard.

"I've been trying and trying to get Captain Arnold's apartment. I can't understand why I don't get any answer."

"Oh, you mean Admiral Mears' apartment, where Captain Arnold has been staying. I don't believe there's anyone there. I just saw the girl go out. I guess now that Captain Arnold's gone she'll take things easy for a while. Admiral Mears won't be back until next week."

"Gone? Did you say Captain Arnold had gone?"

"Yes, ma'am. He left on Saturday. We're forwarding his mail to Cuba if you'd care to write. Any messages for the Admiral?"

"No, there isn't any message."

Mechanically Isabel hung up the receiver. Almost instantly the telephone rang again. Because she had not yet risen from her chair at the telephone table, Isabel, still acting mechanically, picked up the receiver again.

"East Elizabeth, New Jersey, is calling Mrs. Stephen Windsor. Is she ready to talk?" Isabel heard the operator saying. She was not ready to talk, she was suddenly filled with panic. She tried to hang up the receiver again, but somehow she could not do so. She had to say "yes"; she had to sit where she was and listen.

“Mrs. Windsor? I have bad news for you. But then I warned you. Have you been listening to the radio this morning? No? Well, your husband has, and he learned that the market has collapsed completely. He’s lost everything he had—including the last remnants of his reason. He may live for years, but I’m afraid I can’t hold out any hope to you that he’ll ever recover.”

Book Two

PART VI

CHAPTER XIX

"CASA CATALINA,
"COYOACAN,
"November 15, 1929.

"DEAREST ZOE,

"I found your letter waiting for me here when Alfredo and I got back from the hacienda four days ago. While I was there I really did not feel in the mood for writing anybody. It seemed to me that I was living in a dream world, and I did not want to do anything except dream myself. But now I feel differently. I feel that the dream is over, in a way, but that I have come back into a real world which is even more beautiful than the dream, if such a thing were possible. And I want to tell you about the real world—my new world which is encompassed by this house, and make you see it, if I can.

"So, first of all, I must tell you what it looks like. Outside, facing the street, the Casa Catalina is not especially remarkable looking; there is nothing about it to suggest a beautiful new world. The house is long and blank and low, coloured cream and red; the windows are the style called "strapped" and have iron grillwork in front of them; the prettiest thing about the façade is the little statue of Santa Catalina in a niche over the big barred door. But the minute the door has swung open, and you have stepped into the portal, and see the patio beyond and the garden beyond that—why, then you know you have found the different world!

"There are flowering plants in the portal, and two wide settees, with immense pottery jars on either side of them and wooden statuettes over them. The paving-stones are very large and laid diamond-wise, and a large glass star-shaped lantern hangs from the beamed ceiling. At the right there is a staircase, and immediately you see that there are more star-shaped lamps hanging at intervals above it, and that the treads are made of small red paving-stones and the risers of blue and yellow tile. But you do not want to go upstairs right away. You might, if you knew how beautiful it is when you get there, but you don't. You think nothing could possibly be as beautiful as the patio towards which you are looking and you want to go on into that.

"There are arched portales (arcades) all around the patio, with

dim old paintings hanging on the walls in their shadow with carved seats underneath them, and vines wreathing their pillars, and more plants rising from more jars that are set against the pillars. And of course there are all kinds of flowers in the patio: night-blooming jasmine and blue lobelias and pink petunias and begonias and geraniums and hibiscus in every sort of colour. You see flowers everywhere around you in this patio, and then when you look up to the second-story gallery you see flower-pots on the iron railing that goes around the house, and hanging vines falling from it, and the top branches of the Indian banana trees, very green against a very blue sky. These trees do not bear any fruit, and Alfredo tells me that they blossom only once in ten years, and that after they blossom they die. But still he says he is never sorry to see them blossom, because he believes that if trees could feel they would not be sorry to die in bearing anything so beautiful. His mother tells me they have been compared to women who lose their lives when their children are born, yet who die rejoicing. Alfredo himself never says anything of the sort to me, but his mother is inclined to tell sad stories.

"Leading out of the arcades which surround the patio are the offices and kitchens and the garage—which was once a stable—and rooms like that. You do not find any living-rooms until you reach the portal next to the garden, at the farther end of the patio. One side of this portal is completely covered by tiling, the upper part of which represents the Virgin of Guadalupe, and a large red lacquer chest, ornamented with brass, stands underneath this picture. On the other side a heavy iron-hinged door leads into a suite which has always been set aside for the eldest son of the family; after he comes of age he lives there, whether he marries or not, until his father dies, when he becomes the head of the family himself. So that is where we are to live, and all my hopes about having a little home of my own have come true after all, just like all my other hopes. There are five rooms in this suite, which is called an *apartamiento*—two bedrooms, each with a bath (so you see there is a room waiting for you and Bob whenever you want to come here!), and a drawing-room and a dining-room and a study, all filled with the most wonderful old furniture and pictures and ornaments that you could possibly imagine. Our morning coffee is served to us here (better than breakfast in France, because luscious fruits like mangoes and papayas go with it), and also the *merienda*, which is the Mexican substitute for supper, and which consists of hot chocolate flavoured with cinnamon, and *tortillas* and Toluca cheese and little cakes, and sometimes one heartier dish like *enchiladas* too. Our dinner, which consists of about everything you could possibly think of and then a lot of other strange spicy dishes besides, of which I think turkey *mole* is the best, we eat upstairs in the big dining-room with the rest of the family. It is all served on silver—platters

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and dishes and cups and even finger-bowls, and I was quite dazzled by it at first, because it is as gorgeous every day as the most elaborate service I have ever seen used at a party in Washington. (Or would be if it were as brightly polished, which I must confess it isn't always, though it looks very splendid anyway.) And, as I say, there is such a superabundance of food that I could not begin to describe it all, and most of it is very good, with the pastes made of avocados and almonds heading the list as far as I'm concerned.

"This feast is served at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and when it is over everyone sinks into a profound coma for several hours, which is not strange considering the amount that has been devoured and the time it takes to digest it in this altitude. I say *about* two, for Mexicans do not seem to bother as much about punctuality as Americans do, and you can't think what a relief it is to me not to have to keep looking at a clock all the time. I always hated to do it, and Alfredo says I will never have to again as long as I live unless I want to. The only clock we have in the *apartamiento* has never gone at all since he can remember, and when I asked him why no one had ever had it fixed, so that it would, he said he supposed because no one had ever seen the slightest reason for troubling to do such a thing.

"It is only a step from the *apartamiento* to the garden, for that lies back of the rear portal where the Virgin of Guadalupe keeps watch. But even before we can get into it we can smell the perfume of the roses and heliotrope and the clove trees and all the other sweet-scented flowers and shrubs that grow there. A long paved alley with a thatched pavilion in the centre runs down the middle of the garden, with borders of flowers forming a raised edge on either side, and narrow gravelled walks, also bordered by flowers, branching in every direction from the paved alley. Alfredo and I wander up and down these walks together, and when we are tired of strolling we go and sit in the swing seat underneath a big bell which hangs from the thatched roof in the pavilion, and listen to the chattering parakeet which lives there and which is a most amusing creature. I do not care about seeing anyone else or going anywhere else because I am so happy here with Alfredo. I understand now why Mexican women stay so much at home. What is the point of going away from home when everything that a woman can possibly want in her life is there?

"Some of the flowers that grow in the garden, like calla lilies and hydrangeas and candytuft and dahlias, were familiar to me already, though I have never seen them growing in such profusion as they do here, and I have already learned many things about them that I didn't know before, and Alfredo is teaching me how to recognize the ones with which I was not familiar and telling me what their names are: the magenta-coloured bougainvillea, for instance, and the flame-coloured datura. He does not force this knowledge or

any other on me, but I think it is important that I should know about these flowers, so that later on, when I have visitors, I shall not appear to be ignorant about what is in my own garden. My mother-in-law gives me lessons, too, while Alfredo is absent at the Foreign Office, where he now goes for a few hours every day. She has told me that marigolds, which I have always thought very bright and cheerful, are the flowers of the dead in Mexico, and that hereafter on All-Souls' Day I will see the graves in the cemeteries covered with them. (We were still in San Antonio on All Souls' Day this year, and we went to the movies and to dinner at a gay little restaurant.) I told her that I never went to cemeteries because they gave me a queer feeling, not fright exactly, but something like that, and she looked at me strangely, and said that of course now I would learn to go to them quite naturally, as Mexican women do; and I suppose I shall, for I do not want to fail in anything that is expected of me as Alfredo's wife. Still, I cannot help being puzzled as to why Mexican women should choose to go to cemeteries when they go out so little, and don't you think it is puzzling yourself, Zoe?

"There is a second Guadalupe in the garden, in the form of a stone statue, and several other statues, and at the extreme end of the paved alley a shrine to Santa Catalina, where the 'saint's lights' are kept burning at night and where the different members of the family and several of the servants frequently go to pray. There are fountains, too, with coloured tiles around them, and high above everything else the pine trees rise. I hope I have made you understand how beautiful this garden is and why I am so happy to stay in it. I have read back what I have written, and I do not seem to have told you half of what there is to tell. But I am afraid that if I write too much about the garden you will get tired of this letter before you have finished it, and I still want to take you upstairs, because you must remember that I had hardly begun to tell you about the house when I got you into the patio and then into the garden.

"So now please pretend that you have walked back to the place where the staircase ascends to the right of the first portal and that you have gone up this stairway. At the top of it you will find another gallery, surrounding the patio on all sides, like the one below it. Every room leads into this gallery, and the ones in the rear also have supplementary terraces, overlooking the garden. You will also find another statue of Santa Catalina in a niche on this floor, a very gorgeous one clad in robes of golden brocade, and several pictures of her. There are a great many pictures, and, except for the family portraits, these are nearly all of saints and of the Crucifixion and of the Nativity. Some of the saints are undergoing martyrdom of various kinds, all very painful-looking, and if the Casa Catalina were my house and no one else's, I think I

should put some of these pictures away where I would not have to look at them all the time. But to Alfredo's mother they are great treasures. She has explained to me in detail what each one means, and these explanations have given me the same sort of strange feeling I had when she talked to me about the cemeteries. But there are some pictures that I like very much, including one of Saint Gertrude, which shows her rather severely robed, but wearing a wreath of pink flowers and holding a taper in one hand and a baby in the other. It is very quaint and sweet. The ones which show the Virgin in a richly coloured stiff robe, shaped like a triangle and embossed in very elaborate designs, also fascinate me for some reason, and there are several of these. And though I have confessed to you that there are some paintings I would rather not have to see, and some statues and screens that carry out the same harrowing ideas, everything else is so beautiful that I think it is very captious of me to even mention that there is anything here that makes me feel uncomfortable, and I hope you will not tell anyone else that I have done so.

"Among the beautiful things are the bright-coloured chests, and the big pieces of brocade hung over the stair landings, and crystal chandeliers that hang from the beamed ceilings, and the carved columns in the corners, and the shell-shaped declivities over the doors, and the surprising little staircases flanked with flower-pots that keep leading unexpectedly to the roof, and the big embossed *baguenos*, and the little black boxes and tables and desks inlaid with mother-of-pearl flowers, and the china cherubs that support the side lamps in the upper gallery, and the 'linen fold' doors, and the milk-glass goblets engraved with fruit designs that completely fill two enormous cabinets, and the shelves fitted into the window casings on which ornaments of every kind are displayed. Of course, these are only a few, and there are many others that I could mention as well, but I think perhaps that is enough for now. There are three drawing-rooms with big folding doors between so that they can all be thrown into one, and a formal dining-room, and an informal breakfast-room—which has one of those surprising little staircases in it—and more bedrooms and bathrooms than I have been able to count as yet or tried to see. However, in the ones where I have been the furniture is either bright and painted or dark and carved, and the beds are enormous, with crucifixes hanging over them and *prie-Dieu* beside them; and on the bed of my sixteen-year-old sister-in-law, Maria Michaela, is a big pile of baby pillows, pink and blue under lace, with a supplementary crucifix resting in the midst of them! This was still another thing which seemed to me rather strange, but when my mother-in-law saw me looking at it she said we must always take every means to remind ourselves that Christ had suffered for our sakes, and that when we were most comfortable—for instance, in a lovely soft bed

piled high with little pillows—it was an especially good time to clasp the crucifix to our breast, and that this was what she had taught Maria Michaela to do.

“This is such a large family that of course it is necessary to have a great many bedrooms. I did not realize how large it would seem until I reached here and saw it all around me. Besides my mother-in-law and father-in-law, whom the servants all call Doña Amelia and Don Luiz, and Alfredo and Maria Michaela, there are Faustino, who is still at the University and rather wild, and Enrico, who is rather morose and would like to be a priest, and Yolanda and Carlota and Lupe, who are all very pretty and apparently rather demure, though I am not sure about the latter—anyway, Maria Michaela does not even pretend to be demure, but is very sparkling and lovely to look at. Then, of course, there is a corresponding number of servants, and simply multitudes of aunts and uncles and nephews and nieces and other kinds of relatives—if there is any other kind of relative, I am really not sure—who keep dropping in all the time. When Alfredo and I go upstairs for dinner we are quite apt to find anywhere from twelve to twenty extra persons sitting around, and after dinner many of them stay to take their siestas. I think some of them stay for *merienda* as well, though I can’t be sure about that, because, as I said, Alfredo and I have it in our own *apartamento*, which is rather a relief.

“Besides all these real people—now please don’t laugh at me—there are the ghosts of the Casa Catalina, and these seem almost as real. I told Veronique about them long ago, so perhaps she has repeated to you what I have said, and I won’t go into details until I am sure, because I honestly don’t want to bore you. But Tomasa, the maid who has been assigned to me, swears that she saw the ghost of the conquistador who built this house walking on the roof by the light of the full moon; so the next afternoon, which was the day Alfredo and I got back from the hacienda, Doña Amelia had the parish priest come here to sprinkle holy water all through the house and offer prayers for protection from evil spirits. And I thought myself that I saw the lady ghost who wears the black dress and the white mantilla going from the third drawing-room into my mother-in-law’s bedroom last evening just at dusk. Now, don’t say it was my mother-in-law herself because, as it happens, she had gone out just then to confession. There is a sweet little chapel on the same street as this house, just about a block away, where she often drops in, besides the wonderful old church where all the family worships, facing the same plaza that the first palace of Cortez stands on. I’ve been there too, though I haven’t been anywhere else yet, because, of course, I’m planning to go to church regularly to please my mother-in-law. That is one thing I know I can do to please her. I’m not sure about the rest. I’m afraid I’m not much like a Mexican girl, and of course it would have been

natural for her to prefer that her eldest son should marry a Mexican. But Alfredo says he is certain I can learn to please her in every respect, and you know I believe whatever Alfredo tells me.

"Now I've run on and on telling you about my new world and not making any comments at all about what you've written me. Just the same, you must know that, except for feeling distressed because Ronnie and Isabel and so many other people we know have lost all their money, what you told me has added to my already great happiness. First of all, it makes me happy to know that the sums I was able to send Father and Mother will tide them over until I can send more, and that Father is beginning to take heart and seem like himself again. I can't bear to think of him as crushed and broken, and I hope that from now on he can go ahead without being so terribly overburdened. Secondly, it makes me happy to know that, in spite of all Mr. Ruthven's wonderful offers and the tempting opportunities he's willing to give you, you've decided you don't want to leave Bob to go abroad, even though this means you may never have a chance to become a famous foreign correspondent. I can understand that it's hard for you and Bob to map out a plan of working together when he has to spend most of his time at Daddy's office; but maybe he could train someone else to take his place there, and maybe you could get someone else to help you while he's doing it. Anyhow, I'm sure now that you and he have made up your minds you want to run a Washington news bureau, you'll eventually find a way to do it. Besides, since Bob's got his Virginia house and garden series so well started, and since the *Examiner* is only too glad to have you stay on the regular staff as long as you will, you haven't got anything to worry about and you can take your time to decide what you'll do next—or, rather, *how* you'll do it! You know, I've always believed there was nothing you *couldn't* do, Zoe, if you put your mind to it, and I don't mind telling you I'm pretty proud of Bob too. I think he wrote a grand story on 'Memory More True Than Mine,' and wasn't that a wonderful name for it? I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it caught the eye of a movie magnate or someone like that, and if you made a lot of money out of it before you get through.

"I wrote that much of this letter while Alfredo was at the Foreign Office, where he was kept quite late last evening, and when he came home he said he had just learned that he was soon to be transferred to another post, and that he thought I ought to see something of Mexico besides the hacienda and the Casa Catalina before we were shipped off to Peru or Persia or some such place. So he suggested that we should go out to Xochimilco—that is, if I would care to. Of course I said I would, though I didn't have any idea what Xochimilco was like. But we got into his car at once and drove out into the country, and he explained to me along the

way- It seems it is a very popular resort where people ride around in little boats that ply through the natural canals intersecting a fertile swampy delta, something like the Spreewald, where you and I went near Berlin, except that at Xochimilco the flat-bottomed boats do not have settees perched upon them, as they do in the Spreewald, but are covered with canopies made of flowers and labelled with names like *Amor*. Alfredo says that if you go there in the daytime, especially on a Sunday, the place is very crowded, and Indians in dugout canoes come gliding up to your flower-trimmed barge with more flowers to sell you, and drinks and provisions of all sorts, and that musicians, also gliding along in dugout canoes, sing and play the guitar and make everything very gay and festive. I should like to see it that way sometime, for I am sure that it must be great fun; but I am glad that the first time I saw it we went at night all by ourselves, for again I can't find words to express the beauty of an experience I have had and that I owe entirely to Alfredo. There was no one else in the canal, and we went on and on and on. The moon was shining brightly, and a strange perfume rose from the daisies that cover the banks of the stream, and tall dark cypress trees rose behind them. There was not a sound anywhere and we hardly spoke at all, except that Alfredo showed me two stars which he says are seen better from Xochimilco than anywhere else and which are called 'The Eyes of Santa Lucia'; also three others that are called 'Las Très Marias.' And he said the eyes of Santa Lucia were looking benignly down on us, and that the three Marys were heaping blessings upon us, and that for this reason we were especially happy while we were there. I loved learning about the stars, just as I have loved learning about the flowers, but it really doesn't matter to me whether they were responsible for our extra happiness or not. I'm only thankful that we've had it.

"By the way, Alfredo asked me to tell you that you mustn't believe the report about another 'revolt' in Mexico. He says there isn't a word of truth in it and very little truth about the friction between the Catholic Church and the present Government. Of course there is some in regard to the latter, and his family, being so very religious, can't help but feel it. However, there is nothing at all to worry about, for conditions are much better than they were three years ago when services were suppressed and the clergy persecuted and exiled. Now, since the agreement that was reached last June, priests have been allowed to return and the churches all reopened. I know this is so because I see them open myself and Doña Amelia is in them every day.

"Alfredo sends every sort of affectionate greeting to you and Bob, and I don't need to tell you that my own devoted love to both of you goes with this letter. I shall count on you to let me know if there is anything further that I can do for Father and Mother, and

also if you think of anything that would be helpful to Isabel or Ronnie. The settlement has gone through, so I have my own money in addition to everything else, and I am sure you will agree that there is absolutely nothing left in the world that I could wish for.

"Lots of love always,

"HELEN.

"P.S.—Twice while I have been reading this through to make sure there were not too many mistakes in it before I sent it off, I've been startled by the night watchman's whistle. He goes up and down the street, blowing this whistle loudly at frequent intervals, and I cannot seem to get used to it. I jump every time I hear him, and I should think that instead of making the suburbs safe, he would give prowling thieves just the chance they need to get out of the way for the moment and then return to their haunts after he has gone along. But Alfredo says the night watchman is an institution and that things do not work out that way."

"CASA CATALINA,

"COYOACAN,

"November 15, 1934.

"DEAREST ZOE,

"It does seem good to be back here again after our five years' absence, and everything looks just as beautiful to me as it did when I came here as a bride, perhaps more so in some ways, for though Asuncion and Bogota were both very interesting posts for Alfredo, they did not compare to Mexico from my point of view. We had no sooner got away from the 'dispute' over the Chaco than we ran into the 'dispute' over Leticia; and these 'disputes' were very disagreeable. They ended by affecting our living conditions a good deal, and, anyway, of course there is no house in the whole world as enchanting as the Casa Catalina. Our own little *apartamento* leading out of the rear portal was just as we left it when Alfredo was called away so suddenly before we were half settled in it, and now I hope and believe that he will be kept at the Foreign Office for a long time so that we can enjoy our wonderful home at our leisure and have the opportunity of welcoming you and all the rest of the family to it

"It seems strange to think that though I have been married so long, I have never written but one letter to you from here before, and that though in a way my life has changed very little in the meantime, yours has changed so much. What I mean is, though Alfredo and I have travelled so far and seen and done so many strange things, none of these has affected us personally or basically, and of course I have no professional life, or any life of my own apart from him, whereas with you and Bob it is entirely different. Your professional life was important long before Bob's was, and

when you were first married you were wondering how you were going to manage to keep the best sort of balance so that his feelings would not be hurt; and, moreover, the depression had complicated everything so much. I do hand it to you, Zoe, as Bob would say, over the success you have made all round. Of course, I think it was a blessing in disguise that Mrs. Drayton defeated Mother when she ran for President-General of the D.A.R. Otherwise, Mother probably never would have been willing to desert Continental Hall for the Senate Office Building, and she certainly seems to be making Father a fine secretary, and getting a great kick out of it herself, because it puts her in the category with so many well-known wives. But I feel pretty sure it was you who started her on that track so that Bob would be released, and I must say you did it very adroitly. Then, of course, Bob had a wonderful break when 'Memory More True Than Mine' was bought by the movies, as I had such a hunch it would be. I mean chiefly because of what it did for his morale; for that was *his* story, wasn't it? And even if he didn't get much out of it financially, the five thousand did make it possible to start The Capital Kaleidoscope Bureau, besides helping Veronique at a time when she needed a lift so much.

"You'd be surprised how many Americans speak to me about 'Capital Kaleidoscope.' You have fans all the way up the Parana River and on practically every Andean peak, and here everyone at the Embassy seems to read it, and a great many people in the country club set and among the big business men too. We keep hearing about it wherever we go, and I'm all puffed up with pride when anyone says to me, 'Robert Morton is your brother, isn't he?' or 'What relation exactly is Zoe Wing to you?' or 'Do the co-authors of 'Capital Kaleidoscope' ever tell you beforehand what they're going to write? It's all in the family, isn't it?'" Alfredo is proud too, and pleased. Not many Mexicans are connected with an American family in a way that means as much as it does to him to have Father firmly entrenched in the Senate and you and Bob heading towards the top in journalism.

"By the fact that I've mentioned the Embassy and the country club set and the big business men, you'll gather that we're going out more than we did at first, which is true. I would still be satisfied to sit quietly at home in the garden all the time, but Alfredo thinks we should mingle with the American colony as much as possible, and of course with his family and his Mexican friends and the Diplomatic Corps; and naturally I am glad to do anything he thinks best in these respects as in all others, though some of the big business men are a little boring and some of the country club set a little fast, and all of the Mexicans still a little strange to me. On the whole I think I enjoy the Diplomatic Corps the most, for though some of its most distinguished members are pretty pompous, it is nice to keep meeting in one country friends that you

have made in another. I'm sure you'll agree with me in this, for you said you were very pleased when René de Blonville turned up at the French Embassy in Washington. So you'll understand why I was glad to see Arthur Kennard, who was Vice-Consul in Paris while you and I were there, when I got to Asuncion, where he is now Chargé d'Affaires, and why I am also glad that Harry Henderson, who was Giles' assistant in Paris, has recently come here as American Naval Attaché. I believe Harry undercut Giles and took you to the Bal de la Victoire, didn't he? Well, he is still very attractive and very resourceful! And speaking of Giles, I suppose it is no news to you that he's doing very well again, after his temporary set-back, though I don't know how closely you've kept in touch with him. Of course he started doing well almost right off or he wouldn't have got away from Guantanamo as soon as he did, and now he seems to have completely redeemed himself. He's at sea again, and I hear through friends that he's made a great hit at every port where his ship has put in. We've kept hoping to see him ourselves, but with two inland posts that hasn't proved practicable.

"I have seemed to have side-tracked myself by writing about Giles, for after mentioning Harry Henderson I meant to tell you right away that the latest and most exciting arrival in Mexico City is Guy Grenville, who is First Secretary at the British Embassy. You know his uncle was Minister here a long while ago, and he spent some time in Mexico City then, so he knows all the ropes and is most tremendously popular. He speaks beautiful Spanish, and rides with the *charros*, and keeps open house, both in town and in the country, where he has rented very typical and very handsome houses, which he runs with English precision and native charm. The Mexicans all say he is *muy simpático*, and for once I know exactly what they mean, since I feel just the same way about him myself, and always have since the first moment I ever saw him. There is something so steadfast about him, and so sincere, that he makes you feel you could turn to him in trouble, no matter how bad it was, and that he'd stand by. Not that there is any trouble, of course, to speak of, but he does give you that feeling.

"The only person I know of who does not like Guy is my mother-in-law, and her attitude has been very cool towards him from the beginning. He started dropping in fairly frequently as soon as he got here, and I thought the reason she resented it was because she was afraid he might take advantage of her hospitality, for a young European diplomat did do this in one instance. It seems that this other man, who is gone now, came back on the same boat with the Terrazas from France; and as they were parting from him on the dock, Doña Amelia and Don Luiz told him they hoped he would consider their house his, according to the good old Mexican custom. But he did not understand that it was just a pleasant phrase, and the next day while they were having *merienda* he drove up in an

old-fashioned hack piled high with all his baggage and never left for three months! Well, of course Guy knows all about Mexican customs, and anyway has feelings much too fine to make any such mistakes; but once he arrived before Alfredo came home from the Foreign Office, and he sat and talked with me about the difference between English gardens and Mexican gardens for fully fifteen minutes before anyone joined us, and this my mother-in-law says was a great breach of etiquette. It never occurred to me that Guy could not come to see me at any time, just as Dabney Turberville goes to see Ronnie at any time, for instance, and I'm sure it didn't to Guy either, in spite of his knowledge of Mexican customs. But now he is very careful always to ask first if Doña Amelia is at home, and to go up to the big *sala* to pay his respects and to stay there if Alfredo happens to be out, and he does not come as much as he used to either, for which I am very sorry.

"While I am speaking about trouble of one sort or another, I may as well tell you that now there does seem to be a little between the Church and the Government, and that this is making my mother-in-law very unhappy. She is not able to practise her religion as freely and fully as she feels she should, and as she must, in order to be contented. While Alfredo and I have been away in Paraguay and Colombia the difficulties that had apparently been all straightened out shortly before we were married have arisen again, and many priests are once more in exile and many churches closed. So far Doña Amelia has always managed to hear Mass somehow, but often she has had to do it by stealth, with the danger of a heavy penalty if she were found out, and she has had to abandon all hope of having Maria Michaela become a nun, at least in Mexico. She had planned to follow the family custom of having at least one daughter a Bride of Christ, and she had selected Maria Michaela for that purpose because she is by far the most beautiful and charming and pleasure-loving of her daughters, and therefore her withdrawal from the world would represent a greater sacrifice than such a step would be for any of the others. Doña Amelia intended to have Maria Michaela enter one of the very rigorous cloistered orders, and when she told me about the discipline that is part of its rule, I flinched just as I did when I first saw the pictures of the martyrdoms. But Doña Amelia never flinches, even when she talks about having her own daughter starved and scourged and wearing a knotted cord around her waist and a crown of thorns on her head.

"I don't know whether Maria Michaela minds as much as her mother because Doña Amelia's plans have gone astray, or whether she would be better pleased to get married like Yolanda. The engagement of Yolanda has recently been announced with a great deal of formality, and she is to have a very elaborate wedding, though it will have to be shorn of some of the religious ceremony with which her mother would have liked to see it surrounded. There

is much excitement over this betrothal in the family, and Yolanda is the centre of attention, but I am not sure that she herself feels the way a girl is happiest to be about the man she is going to marry. Several times she has looked to me as if she had been crying and once I overheard Doña Amelia saying something to her that sounded rather harsh and crude to me. Still, I may have been mistaken. Of course, I speak Spanish very fluently now, but there are some phrases that have a double meaning, as they do in every language, and these I still find it hard to follow. Yolanda's *novio* is a big, brutal-looking man, and I do not blame her for being upset at the idea of going away with him at night to an isolated hacienda when she has never really been alone with him in broad daylight in her parents' beautiful house. The thought of her having to do so upsets me very much. But Doña Amelia is greatly pleased about the marriage, and she expects to arrange for Lupe also as soon as Yolanda has gone away, though I understand that in this instance the prospective bridegroom is old and feeble instead of being young and violent.

"Speaking of haciendas, a lady came to call the other day who is a distant relative, but whom I had not met before because she was in the country when I arrived at the Casa Catalina as a bride. She was dressed in deep black, but of course that is quite the custom here, so I thought nothing of it, until I noticed that her two sisters, who were with her, were not in mourning, so I realized she must be a widow, though whether one of recent date or not I could not tell, for in Mexico once a widow always a widow, *crêpe* and all. But after a little she turned to me and said in the most easy way in the world, just flicking her handkerchief—which had a black border over an inch wide—lightly across her eyelids, 'Perhaps, since you have so recently returned from Bogota, you have not heard that my husband was assassinated at our hacienda late in August? I was with him at the time, but unfortunately I was so overcome by fright that I could do nothing to prevent the outrage.' My breath was so taken away by such calmness that I did not know what to say, but before the pause could become awkward, one of the other callers commenced a story of her own, telling me that she had been worried about her husband, too, but that fortunately he was now over sixty-five and consequently past the age when a man could be either imprisoned or executed for a political offence. She ended up by asking if we had the same age limit in the United States, and I was thankful that at this point Alfredo came to my rescue.

"Having digressed to supply you with these anecdotes, which I hope will interest you, I must now tell you that this year we did get here for *Todos Los Santos*—All Saints' Day—and that I found the celebration very intriguing, although a little gruesome. Several days beforehand little white sugar skulls, called *calaveras*, ornamented with gilt eyes and pink frills, begin to appear in the win-

dows of all the bakers and confectioners and many outdoor stands besides, and fond Mexican parents start buying these for their children to enjoy, either in the form of food or in the form of play-things. At about the same time that the skulls begin to appear, the local garbagemen pay special visits to the houses where they regularly go to collect, and leave little cards like the one I am sending you as a sample. All Souls', the day after All Saints', is their special feast, though why it should be is another mystery to me, and of course they expect, and get, a generous tip to celebrate the occasion. A free translation of the inscription on the card goes something like this:

“ ‘ The truck driving garbage collector
Ventures to beg for his skull.

“ ‘ Highly honoured little patron,*
Do not forget the skull
Which your garbage collector begs for.
I hope that in your goodness,
You will not be offended,
But that on this great day our patrons
Will give us an offering.’

“ The offering that the garbageman wants is money, but—presumably—he uses this to buy the same sort of thing that all the servants are preparing—sausages and chocolate and *pan de los muertos*—‘the bread of the dead,’ which is a large sugar-coated loaf with egg-shaped protuberances on it. Our servants, and many other persons whom we know, put these edibles and various others on tables neatly laid with white cloths and lighted with candles, and around the tables they place chairs in the same number that there are dead members of their families; then they leave all this in locked rooms for twenty-four hours. A great deal of secrecy surrounds the proceedings, so that though I managed to see something of the preliminary preparations, I didn’t see a room after it was completely ready to be locked up. But I know there were several in this very house, some prepared by the servants and one by Doña Amelia herself, and at least one in every other house in the neighbourhood.

“ Besides the money that is spent on *calaveras* and *pan de los muertos*, a great deal is apparently also spent on gigantic wreaths, made of both real and artificial flowers, and on silver and ebony crosses, also huge, which are somehow lashed to the sides of every other car that you meet on your way to the cemetery. Spades and buckets are also fastened on to these cars, all ready for use upon arrival at the family lot, so that holes can be dug to set the crosses in and water carried to put on the flowers, which as Doña Amelia told me five years ago, are very apt to be marigolds, though this is

* (“ If you put anything in the diminutive, that is supposed to be a sign of affection. It has not necessarily anything to do with size.”)

by no means always the case. Large quantities of food and drink are likewise carried along in the over-laden cars, and while the behaviour of families like the Terrazas and their friends is of course respectful and restrained, plenty of other people are simply looping before the day is over. They make a day of it in the cemetery, and then when night comes one and all go to see a performance of *Don Juan Tenorio*, which is given in practically every place of amusement in the city, from the fine big Opera House to the cheap music halls and the Punch and Judy shows. It varies very much in treatment, of course, but the underlying story is always the same, and it is the same one, too, that Byron wrote a poem about and Mozart composed an opera around and John Barrymore did such a good job with in the movies. We all went to the Opera House—having been at the family vault all day—and when I said I did not see why the story of an awful roué was especially fitting to dwell upon on The Day of the Dead, my mother-in-law told me to wait until I saw the graveyard scene where Don Juan is driven by remorse for murdering his true love's father, and Doña Inez rises from her tomb. Well, I did wait, but I only wish, Zoe, that I had left the Opera House before that scene was put on, because I cannot pretend that I liked it. The stage lights were all very pale and eerie, and the tombs were shadowy and shiny by turns, and Doña Inez came out of hers in her shroud. It was all I could do to remain in my seat when she put her arms around Don Juan, and I did try, first to get up and then to lower my eyes; but Doña Amelia, who was sitting on one side of me—of course, Alfredo was on the other side—took my hand and held it hard and whispered that I would disgrace them all if I moved or looked down, because it was as bad to avoid a performance of *Don Juan Tenorio* as to avoid a bull fight, and no one will ever know how horrible those are to me. So I did not stir again, and I looked steadily at the tombs and the ghosts, but I had dreadful nightmares afterwards and Alfredo says I cried in my sleep, and the next day I saw the apparition of the lady in the white mantilla again.

"I realize that by this time your plans for the winter must be all made and I know how hard it is for both you and Bob to leave the Bureau. But it really is an awfully long time since I have seen any of you, and I am wondering if you could not possibly come here for the Christmas holidays. It would mean everything to me if you could, and perhaps you might combine business with pleasure, for you could write about political conditions and Bob could write about houses and gardens. I know he'd get a story out of the Casa Catalina that would be even better than "Memory More True Than Mine," and there are three or four other places, in Coyoacan alone, that are right down his alley, as Mr. Ruthven says. The one diagonally across the street, for instance, has the entire courtyard filled with poinsettias which are at the height of their bloom

at Christmas-time; in fact, they're called the flowers of the *Noche Buena* here; and in the rear of the house is a vast park, with every sort of tropical tree in it, and every tree hung with a legend. Then, of course, he should go to the Borda gardens in Cuernavaca, which Maximilian and Carlotta designed, and which are simply flooded with romance, and the Bosque del Contador near Texcoco, where no watchman will ever remain at night because of the strange spirits, and oh—to dozens of other places! I am sure it would really be very worth your while from a practical point of view, and it would make me awfully happy. Of course I am awfully happy, anyway, and I have never had a single second of regret for having married Alfredo—how could I?—but I don't seem to be any more like a Mexican myself than I was in the beginning, and naturally I don't make close friends among people who feel I am an alien. Of course, the Embassy crowd and the country club set and big business men are all very nice, as I said before, but they are more what Mother used to call "pleasant acquaintances" than intimate friends. I know Guy is my friend, but then I never see him to talk to, so it is not quite the same as if I could, and I do wish I could talk to somebody who belongs to me and comes from home.

"My love to both Ronnie and Isabel whenever you happen to see them. I'm so sorry for them both. But then I realize very few women have as many reasons to be happy as I have. I'm still sure that Alfredo is the most wonderful human being in the world, and as long as I have him and his love nothing else really matters. I hope I haven't given you the false impression that I thought it did.

"As ever devotedly,

"HELEN."

CHAPTER XX

At first the walk between her Florida Avenue apartment and the French Embassy had seemed very long to Isabel. She really did not know whether she minded it more in the morning or in the evening. In the morning she was still dazed with the fatigue that comes with a forced awakening after insufficient sleep, and breathless from hurrying through serviceless dressing and breakfasting. Her salary was good, as secretarial salaries go, but most of it went in keeping Stephen at his sanitarium, and she had almost no other source of income, so she kept no maid. In the evening she was drained of ideas and initiative, after writing letters and answering the telephone and making out lists and pouring tea and smoothing over difficulties and forestalling complaints and averting crises; yet the necessity of performing trifling yet multitudinous personal tasks before she could go to bed still loomed large ahead of her. Both morning and evening were pretty bad, but she thought evening was a little the worse of the two, because she hated to wash out stockings and underwear and handkerchiefs even more than she hated to make coffee and straighten up her room; and no matter how hard she tried, she could not contrive to do her laundry work in the morning.

Gradually, however, she had come to enjoy the walk. The fresh air revived her speedily and potently, like a cocktail; the exercise sent a tingling sensation through all her tissues and gave a glow to her cheeks. She looked lovely when she reached her destination, and the knowledge of her heightened charms was a tonic in itself. And she needed a tonic very much in these days.

She no longer had to slacken her pace as she went up the hill. She took the ascent swiftly, noting the scene around her with interested eyes, despite her speed. It was amazing to see how rapidly the park was progressing. On the other hand, the disintegration of the grandeur which had formerly faced it was even more startling. Greystone Towers was a lodging-house now. Battered two-seaters stood in a sagging line where sleek limousines used to turn silently in, and the unkempt grounds were littered with trash of every kind and description. Milk bottles stood in the windows and washing waved from the rear porch. Isabel did not know exactly who lived there, but she gathered it must be clerks from the lowest salary brackets in the "alphabet" positions. The last trace of Mrs. Endicott's occupancy had long since gone. As for Mrs. Endicott herself, the wreckage of the splendour with which she had once been surrounded was now embodied in her own

shrunk frame and addled mind. No one could understand, Isabel least of all, how Veronique Hunter, whose hands were certainly full enough already, and whose every obligation to her grandmother had been erased by the old woman's previous inhumanity to herself, could endure having Mrs. Endicott at Hunter's Green. But there she was installed, and there she sat writing letters hour after hour to the legislators who had crowded around her fantastic dinner-table, urging them to "use their influence" to dislodge "that man"—as she invariably referred to the President—and the undependable "crew of crazy reformers" whom he had gathered around him from the seats of the mighty before it was "too late."

It had been "too late," as far as Mrs. Endicott and hundreds of others like her were concerned, long before the stolid Shaw had been replaced by the mercurial Conrad as Chief Executive. Isabel had learned that—not easily or quickly, any more than she had learned to walk easily and quickly uphill, but slowly and painfully the knowledge had come to her. The crash which had cost her friends and herself their fortunes had marked the end of an era, and the forces of destruction had been gathering momentum long before that. But Mrs. Endicott would never see this; and again Isabel marvelled, a little impatiently, at Ronnie's forbearance, as she considered Ronnie's almost light-hearted refusal to be drawn into arguments about the present political powers. Ronnie was light-hearted about everything, as far as Isabel could see—about the staggering financial load which she was carrying single-handed at Hunter's Green; about Welby's continued helplessness; about her grandmother's constant complaining; about the incessant care which a riotous child represented. Bennie, who was now five years old, would have run most young mothers ragged before mid-morning, Isabel thought; but though Ronnie might be very tired sometimes after Bennie was finally in bed for the night, she did not look tired. She looked triumphant, and, as Isabel had previously remarked, light-hearted as well. There was a sort of triumph which was rather grim, but that was not Ronnie's kind.

As she went on past the Majestic Hotel, Isabel reflected that it had changed almost as much as Greystone Towers. Not that it had crumbled, like the pseudo-battlements she had just left behind her; on the contrary, to use a current phrase, it had been "jazzed up." Its aspect had formerly been one of elaborate elegance tempered by a certain amount of dignity; now it had branched out ostentatiously to meet the modernistic mood of the moment. The number of senatorial families, of great judicial figures and retired army officers living there had dwindled; on the other hand, it was crowded now with the top executives of the independent offices, agencies and establishments newly but increasingly listed in the Congressional Directory. Isabel had no sooner mastered the functions and identi-

fied the directors of one such office than another sprang into existence, and she was obliged to cope with that. The French Ambassador was very insistent about this. Unquestioningly as he deferred to her judgment in most respects, he did not permit her to overlook the turbulent new forces in Washington, which, left to herself, she would have been glad to disregard. In spite of his soaring social aspirations, he was essentially a progressive himself. He had originally been a silk manufacturer, who had swung jauntily and rather insolently all the way up from the looms at Lyons to the salons of the Quai d'Orsay. He did not belong by either inheritance or training to the prim pattern into which the Marceaus had fitted so admirably. But then, Isabel reflected ruefully, almost nobody belonged there any more, and, as far as that went, the pattern itself was gone.

The Marceaus had still been at the Embassy when Isabel secured her position as social secretary there. Indeed, if it had not been for Madame Marceau, Isabel would never have obtained it, as she herself was quite well aware. Her first idea, after she had finally grasped the fact that Stephen's fortune was gone and that she must manage to support both him and herself, had been that she might get into the White House. There had been rumours of a rift between Mrs. Shaw and her secretary, and when these were confirmed by a precipitate resignation on the part of the latter, Isabel's friends all urged her to lose no time in calling her own excellent qualifications for the post to Mrs. Shaw's hesitant notice. But for some unexplained reason Mrs. Shaw had failed to take advantage of the opportunity thus fortuitously offered her. In spite of all the pressure brought to bear, she had stubbornly persisted in choosing a young woman from the Middle West, an ex-school teacher, and the daughter of one of her own classmates at an obscurely select seminary in Ohio as her social secretary. The chaos which resulted had been disastrous. The ex-school teacher was a conscientious Christian woman, but the intricacies of official Washington were beyond her ken. She could not remember the names of diplomats, the respective ranks of Cabinet officers, or the faces of senators' wives. After a futile struggle, she tearfully departed whence she had come, to be replaced by a cousin who repeated her mistakes, and whose presence in the White House was regarded by her victims as insult added to injury.

Under the more gracious guidance of Mrs. Conrad, conditions had greatly changed; the President's wife had two secretaries now, one as competent to handle complex social demands as the other was capable of acting in a business capacity and co-operating with the Press, which at last had come into its own. But by the time the Shaw administration had passed out of the picture Isabel herself was too firmly entrenched at the French Embassy to jeopardize her security by seeking, or even appearing to seek, a more lofty but less

stable position. Madame Marceau had received her first overtures sympathetically; she had always had a soft place in her otherwise somewhat adamant heart for Isabel, who spoke such extraordinary French for an American, whose taste in dress was so impeccable, and whose bearing so unmistakably bespoke the aristocrat. To be sure, Marceau had been disquieted by certain whispers lightly wafted across the Atlantic during the fateful summer of 1929—the same rumours which unfortunately had reached the long-lobed ears of Mrs. Shaw and which had indirectly been responsible for the ex-school teacher. But Madame Marceau, a model of propriety herself, had decided that these whispers had probably been malicious, partly, as she confessed to herself—though to no one else—because she desired her decision to take that form. She had not even admonished Isabel to take especial care where discretion was concerned, for her instinct had told her that such an admonition would have been not only tactless but superfluous. And her instinct had been unerring. Isabel was a perfect pattern of all that a secretary should be. When Monsieur Marceau was finally recalled by a Progressive Government less grateful for his long and faithful services than it was intolerant of his ultra-conservative outlook, his wife's greatest pang in leaving Washington came upon parting from her secretary.

Isabel's concern lest the new Ambassador might not care to retain her had been great, but she had managed to conceal this, and her composure, no less than her competence, had vastly impressed Monsieur Cauteret, the ex-silk manufacturer; nor had her culture and her charm left him unmoved. He was a married man, but his wife had not risen with him, and she had elected to remain secluded in the brick villa on the outskirts of Lyons, where she had dwelt throughout her early married life, instead of accompanying him to Paris and thence to Washington. Ill-health was given as the cause of her failure to appear, and an unmarried daughter, a singularly graceless woman of Isabel's own age, acted as her father's hostess. Mademoiselle Pauline was only too thankful to leave the actual management of all social affairs in Isabel's skilled white hands; she did not take kindly to Washington, nor Washington to her. She performed those duties that could not be avoided, but left all those of secondary importance to Isabel and devoted her own large and lonely leisure almost entirely to charity. Such distinction as the French Embassy enjoyed was due partly to the proud traditions of its past but much more largely to its present administration by its social secretary.

No one was more keenly aware of this than Monsieur Cauteret himself. His complacency over Isabel's management increased by leaps and bounds. It was rarely indeed that he made a suggestion concerning a matter that fell, or could be construed as falling, within her province. She divined his taste and forestalled his requirements, and the situation was one of great mutual satisfaction. If Isabel had

permitted herself to dwell on her employer's personal attributes, these might have been repugnant to her; but she had learned to regard them objectively. His beady black eyes and bushy black hair, his ruddy cheeks bulging above his rough chin, his protuberant paunch and hairy hands, his general air of oiliness and frowsiness, his stiffly starched linen that was never quite clean, his rumpled clothes that were always a little too tight—a few years earlier Isabel would have regarded all these with such deep aversion that this would have blinded her to the man's intrinsic force, persistency and shrewdness. Now she could appraise him accurately for what he was. She had come a long way in a comparatively short time.

She was musing on this one day when she looked up from the note she was theoretically writing to see that Monsieur Cauteret was standing before her. Despite his size and apparent clumsiness, he moved with catlike quietude; she seldom heard him when he came down the corridor that led to her little office. But, as far as that went, he did not often come to her office. Usually she was called, once or twice a day as the occasion required, to his study, where one or more members of his male staff were always on duty during business hours. She also saw him at luncheon and dinner, when he entertained, and at teatime, on the days when Mademoiselle Pauline received, for on these occasions she was always present. In her own small sanctum, however, she was usually left quite alone. She rightly regarded his appearance as portentous.

"*Bon jour, Excellence,*" she said smilingly. "*Quel plaisir inattendu!*" They always spoke French together, and her perfect command of his mother tongue was a source of great gratification to him, as it had been to his predecessor. "*Il y a quelque chose?—Is there anything I can do for you? Asseyez-vous, je vous en prie—*"

She indicated the easy-chair at right angles to her desk, but she did not rise herself or even lay down the pen she was holding. Her reception of him, like everything else she did, was pleasing to him. If a lady of her importance had risen to greet a man she would have created an inharmonious effect of subservience; but if she had put down her pen she would have indicated that she made the mistake of giving the call a social character. Decidedly this secretary of his was a pearl among gentlewomen. Momentarily he hesitated to broach the subject which he had in mind; it seemed like an impertinence to make any suggestions to so perfectly poised and capable a being as Madame Vinzorre.

"Do not derange yourself, I beg of you, Madame," he said protestingly. There was nothing against which to protest; nevertheless, the phrase seemed appropriate. He sat down, puffing a little, glanced about him with his bright beady eyes, and drummed hurriedly with his stubby fingers on the arms of his chair. "The invitations for the twenty-eighth, they are out already?" he inquired

at length. His cursory but appreciative gaze shifted to the desk of his secretary from the observation of a coloured print hanging on the wall. The print depicted the preparations for bed of an unembarrassed young lady, whose admirer was watching her progress towards nudity with eagerness, not to say impatience, and the Ambassador had always considered it an outstanding ornament of his official habitation. Still he felt no reluctance in looking instead at the lovely young woman, modishly but conservatively attired in navy crêpe finished with spotless white frills, who was seated in the flesh so conveniently close to him.

"They are all addressed. I was intending to send them out with Pierre later in the morning. Do you wish some changes made in them, Excellency?"

"No changes. But possibly one or two additions."

"I will note down the names at once, if you will be so good as to give them to me. Then the additional invitations can go out with those I have already prepared. We can seat four more persons at the table, so I shall not be obliged to await possible regrets."

Isabel's pencil was already poised, but the telephone at her elbow tinkled, and she picked up the receiver and spoke suavely. "French Embassy, Mrs. Windsor speaking," she said, and waited a minute. The Ambassador noticed that she continued to smile, and that her eyes had the same alert look which would have brightened them if she had been talking to someone in person. "Oh yes, Mrs. Rutherford. How are you this lovely day? Why, I'm sorry to hear that, very sorry indeed. No, I haven't had exactly the right opportunity to do so yet, but perhaps I shall, this very morning. No, I shan't forget. Yes, indeed, I hope so, very soon." She replaced the receiver and turned towards the Ambassador, her lovely smile deepening. "You have met Mrs. Rutherford several times, I believe," Isabel said. "She used to be an outstanding social leader, and she still goes out a good deal, though she entertains very little herself now. I'm sorry to say that she lost considerable money in the depression. She is thinking of giving up her house for an apartment, and if she does that she will not need her drawing-room furniture any more. It is Louis Seize, really very good Louis Seize. She has been hoping that I might help her find a purchaser."

"If she is so fortunate as to secure a recommendation from you, Madame, there can be no question of her success in disposing of it. Were it not for the fact that this house is already so amply equipped I should be glad to consider it myself."

"Should you decide to move the Embassy into larger quarters, as you are considering, there might be space for it. But I'm afraid that poor Mrs. Rutherford cannot wait so long. I fear her need is really very pressing. Possibly the young de Blonvilles, who have just arrived, might consider it. I understand that the bride has a good deal of money. If you approve, I might approach her, Excel-

lency. But I must not take up your valuable time with such trifles as these. You were about to give me some names?"

"Yes. The new Governor of the Federal Reserve Board seems to me a very distinguished gentleman. It occurred to me that he would make an advantageous addition to the list. And as I understand he is a bachelor, the lady who has just taken Mr. Whittlesea's seat in the House of Representatives might perhaps be asked at the same time. Her name is Whittlesea, too, it seems. Is she then his widow? So many of these lady lawmakers seem to be widows of former legislators."

"No, she is his daughter," Isabel answered, jotting down the names. "But she succeeded in the same way that the widows do." Isabel was pleased with her own pun, and her smile became still more sprightly. The Ambassador, aware that she must have said something amusing without knowing what it was, laughed appropriately and then went on with what he had to say.

"Then there is a young couple whom I seem to be meeting everywhere. Both immensely attractive. They were at the Mexican Embassy last night and I had quite a long talk with them—the lady first and then later her husband. A Mr. and Mrs. Robert Morton."

Isabel's moving pencil paused. The stop was so momentary that she did not see how the Ambassador could possibly have noticed it. But nothing escaped his beady eyes.

"Do you not know this young couple, Madame?"

"Yes, I know them."

"Is it then that you disapprove of them for some reason that you never included their names in a dinner list? My daughter tells me that they have called."

"Oh yes, they have called—and cards were mailed in return. I advised Mademoiselle that I did not feel it was necessary she should repay their call in person. With Washington growing at the rate it has, it is too much to expect that an official hostess should make any but official visits. That tedious practice of returning all calls is being generally abandoned, as I explained."

"But I gathered that in this case there were official connections at least. The young man's father is in the Senate, is it not so? And his sister is married to some fabulously wealthy Mexican diplomat, a relative of the Mexican Ambassador here?"

"Yes, Excellency. But very few of the senators, as you know, have any real social status. The older Mortons are not among those who do. Madame Morton *mère* acts as her husband's secretary, succeeding her son in that position when he left it to establish a news bureau with his wife, and what leisure she has is devoted entirely to organization work. She is what is generally known as a 'typical clubwoman.' By instinct she moves from committee meeting to committee meeting, rather than from drawing-room to drawing-room. And the husband is a drab creature. He has been

in the Senate seven years now, and he has never yet done or said anything of importance. It is generally supposed that only the timely intervention of his Mexican son-in-law saved him from bankruptcy and defeat. And I do not need to tell you that Latin-American diplomats do not enjoy the same prestige as Europeans."

"*Chère Madame*, I have every confidence in your judgment, and with reason. But is it not possible that there has been a change in the viewpoint on social standing as there has been in so many others? Committee meetings may be as highly regarded nowadays as drawing-rooms, and Mexican money, at least, is as good as French money—in fact, with the debt situation what it is, I fear there are some Americans who think it is better!" The Ambassador laughed, rather ruefully, but he went on. "Let us leave the official connections aside for the moment, however. The news bureau which these young Mortons control is very influential, is it not? It is an *agence*, a syndicate you say, appearing in many papers? And it seems that this syndicate is as popular as the persons who produce it, and that they are everywhere received."

"No, not everywhere. Only at the White House and in the White House set. Or perhaps I should add also in the hunt country of Virginia and among the Latin-Americans. But never——"

The Ambassador laughed, more comfortably. "*Eh bien*, the White House, that is still something, is it not, Madame, even without the White House set and the hunt country and the Latin-Americans?"

"It is still something. But I do not know how much. All sorts of strange creatures go to the White House nowadays. My friend Mrs. Burgess told me that the last time she went there to lunch she did not find a single acquaintance in the circle drawn up in the Blue Room—she was completely surrounded by outsiders, and one of these uncouth women took off her hat and put it on the mantelpiece."

The Ambassador laughed again, all trace of ruefulness now gone. "I'm afraid this is not an age of elegance," he said. "I should rather like to meet the lady who put her hat on the mantelpiece. She must be an individualist. But as far as these *jeunes mariés* to whom I have taken a fancy are concerned, if there is any real objection to them——"

"I did not say there was any real objection. They are younger than most of the persons you have honoured with invitations so far. And they are really rather inconsequential, in spite of this well-publicized syndicate of theirs. I do not know that your other guests would feel especially complimented at being included in a gathering with them. Particularly your guests of honour. The British Ambassador and Lady Selby still draw the lines very closely. They are not like the President and Mrs. Conrad in that respect. May I suggest that perhaps you might invite the Robert

Mortons to a smaller dinner, a less significant one? Or to a Sunday luncheon? A Sunday luncheon is always such a safe solution!"

"But the Selbys were at the Mexican dinner last night and there was no awkwardness! Sir Rupert talked with young Mrs. Morton for some time, just as I did, and appeared to enjoy her conversation quite as much. And it seems that she and husband are never here on Sundays, that they spend all their week-ends at some château in Virginia—Hunter's Green, is that the name? It belongs to the stepson of the Italian Councillor, an unfortunate cripple who is married to a charming compatriot of my own. I have been meaning to ask you, Madame, to arrange that I should receive an invitation to Hunter's Green myself, since this incomparable young Corsican never leaves her afflicted husband, and is herself well worth meeting. I have also heard that the Robert Mortons have an interest in the stock farm which is run in connection with this historic estate. The young lady comes from Kentucky, she is immensely interested in horses and has succeeded in interesting her husband in them also. Therefore this advantageous partnership has been established, with the result, alas! that I could not hope to have them at the Embassy for a Sunday luncheon."

"The young lady comes from Kentucky!" echoed Isabel. This time she actually did fling her pencil aside, and she failed to pick it up again. "Did you get the impression, Excellency, that she was reared in the bluegrass region, with a stable full of thoroughbreds at her command? Because, if you did, I fear I must disillusion you."

"But not at all. On the contrary, she told me that in her youth she had never owned a horse because she was too poor. However, she had always eagerly longed to do so, and she began by keeping a single mount at Hunter's Green as soon as she could afford to do so. Then one thing led to another, and this partnership in the stock farm of which I spoke was formed. What is then so strange? I confess I do not follow you, Madame. I am sure I understood Madame Morton perfectly, for while her French has not the finish of yours it is more than adequate, and she expresses herself with clarity in conversation as on paper. She has spent considerable time in France, she understands our psychology and interprets our policies ably. Indeed, I must repeat that I found her most amusing. If she comes from plain people, what of that? She has come a long way. I am a *bourgeois* myself, I have never disguised that from you, and I admire those who have the power to rise above the past more than those who dwell in its shadows. In short, I like this young lady very much. And now you show me plainly that you do not like her."

"I'm sorry to have been so tactless, Excellency. Of course the invitations will go out at once in the way you have directed. And permit me to correct your impression. I do not dislike Zoe Wing

and Bob Morton. It is simply that I never think of them in connection with any event of importance. And every event at the French Embassy is, essentially, one of importance."

The pencil which Isabel had abandoned rolled from the desk to the floor. She leaned over to retrieve it. But the Ambassador forestalled her. In spite of his bulk he moved with agility and ease. Picking up the errant pencil he handed it to her with a bow.

"You help to make it so, Madame," he said gallantly. "I should indeed be lost without your assistance. But I am grateful that in this case you indulge me in my small whim."

CHAPTER XXI

THE invitation to the dinner at the French Embassy in honour of the British Ambassador and Lady Selby lay on the top of a pile of similar missives delivered to the Mortons in the course of the day. Pearl Gray had learned to differentiate not only between begging letters, business letters and invitations, but also between invitations which did not amount to much and those which had great significance. She had arranged them both neatly and symbolically in rows over the spotless blotter on the small writing-desk which bisected Zoe's precious bookcase, between the shaded porcelain lamp which stood on one side and the slender flower-filled silver vase which stood on the other. Zoe contrived to keep order, to an astonishing degree, on her desk in the well-run office which she and Bob shared in the National Press Building. But it had a different quality from the order which reigned in the old house which they had acquired in the charming and historic suburban town of Alexandria two years after their marriage.

Zoe loved her house and Bob shared her affection for it; but she had never yet entered it without feeling that its purchase had been futile. Subconsciously she stopped to listen, as soon as she was inside the front door, for a pattering sound that never came, and to look across the long hall for a sight she never saw. For when she and Bob had decided to buy the house, to redeem and beautify it in spite of the disrepair and disfigurement with which years of neglect and abuse had marked it, their main reason for preparing to leave the Eye Street apartment had been in the expectation of an impending need for larger quarters.

Zoe had been very happy about this. She had given careful and intelligent thought to the scraping and oiling of wide-planked floors, to the demolition of spurious partitions, to the renovation of exquisite old woodwork, and to the installation of the most modern type of plumbing, heating, lighting and kitchen equipment. But nothing had given her the same sort of delight that she had experienced in fitting up the quaint, low-ceilinged little room, leading by a short flight of steps from the great high-studded chamber beside it, as a model nursery. More than a hundred years before a little boy who was later to become one of the South's greatest heroes had slept there, with the door at the top of the flight of steps opening into his parents' room. Now Zoe, as she watched the unbricking of the shallow white-mantelled fireplace and the reswinging of the "witch" doors on their "heaven and hell" hinges, placed a canopied crib on the same spot where the

great hero's little cot had stood, and envisaged another child sleeping in the same place who should live to lead his fellow-men.

At first Bob had welcomed the prospect of a baby less wholeheartedly than she did. He had never changed his viewpoint that their marriage should be childless, at least for a long time, on her account; he felt that any kind of added family cares would handicap her in her work, of which he was increasingly proud, and he was determined that he would not be responsible for arresting its progress. But his attitude was not wholly disinterested. He was still passionately in love with Zoe, and he was stubbornly opposed to any possible interruption of their intimate relationship or any interference with its intensity. He resented the idea of intrusion upon the solitude which they shared in such ecstasy after the crowded, gruelling days in which they went their separate ways. He told Zoe this, bluntly and without compromise.

"I don't want you to spend half the night quieting a crying baby and I don't want you getting up at break of dawn to feed it," he grumbled. "Let alone rushing home from the office every evening to play with it before it goes to bed and never having any time to go out and play with *me*. I suppose Sundays would be spent entirely in bending over the crib."

"No, they wouldn't. I promise I'll spend Sundays any way you like. Evenings, too. We can afford a nurse. She can do the night work. I'll— Everything will be just the same, Bob, between us, as it's always been."

"What do you mean, as it's always been? You'd have to go to a hospital, and even before you went and after you got back——"

"I don't think I'd have to stay in the hospital more than two weeks. I wouldn't leave you until I had to and I'd come back to you just as soon as they'd let me. I'd miss you too, Bob. Of course, I'd want to feed the kid if I could, myself, but probably I couldn't very long, anyway. I'm not built like Veronique, worse luck."

"You ought to be thankful you haven't got caught so far. You've been pretty careless, you know, in spite of all I've said."

"I don't call it being careless. I call it being consistent: I've told you all along I wouldn't 'take precautions.' But I've been disappointed. For more than a year now. A woman isn't complete until she's had a child."

"You're beginning to talk just like Veronique. For heaven's sake, skip it."

She did not pursue the subject in the face of his growing irritation, but her silence did not deceive him. He knew that as far as this was concerned Zoe would never agree with him; and though she might refrain from pressing the point, in the interests of surface concord, the deep mutual harmony of their relationship would eventually be disturbed by their disagreement. Being essentially

fair-minded, he also recognized the fact that since she had deferred to his wishes in so many minor respects, he might well give way in this one vital matter. But he did not say so, with the result that she did not confide in him when she first had reason to believe that her repeated disappointments were over. It was not until his own suspicions were roused, and he broached the subject again himself, that she admitted her pregnancy.

"Why didn't you go ahead and tell me?" he said, rather resentfully. "After all, you might have known I'd ask you pretty soon. We're not living in the days when a man was supposed to get the surprise of his life when a sweet secret was whispered to him. I look at calendars sometimes myself— Do you feel all right? Don't you think you ought to slow up a little?"

"I feel fine. And I haven't the least idea of slowing up. But I do want to go house-hunting. We'll have to move, Bob. There's no room for a kid here, and I suppose that if I'm going to heave furniture around I'd better begin to do it as soon as possible and not do it too fast."

"If I catch you heaving any furniture I'll beat you until you're black and blue."

"Well, I'm told that's not so good for the expectant mother, either. But I promise that I'll leave all the actual hauling to you and the moving men, if you'll promise to stick around. I'll do the planning, or most of it, though. You appreciate interior decorating after it's finished, Bob, but I wouldn't say you had much initiative about it— Do you think we could start looking for a house next Sunday?"

He did a little more muttering and growling, but he was on hand for the house-hunting, and when he saw that her heart was set on the beautiful, battered old mansion in Alexandria he was not slow to say that it suited him to a T. They arranged to buy it, without unduly straining their resources, through a Home Finance Corporation, and the process of restoration progressed smoothly and rapidly with few delays and difficulties. Though Bob suspected that Zoe did not always feel fully as well as she insisted, he could not attribute the signs of fatigue and discomfort which she sometimes betrayed to the house. Even when they moved he safeguarded her so watchfully, that the black circles around her eyes, the sagging of her shoulders, and the increasing slowness with which she walked were no more pronounced than they had been for weeks already; and they were well installed in their quarters more than two months before the baby was due. It was when they were really settled themselves, and Zoe kept consulting him about the finishing touches for the nursery, that Bob began to realize that the thought of a little child, sleeping and playing and growing in the quaint little room beside their own great rectangular chamber, had ceased to be an annoyance and had become a source of zestful anticipation.

"I've put sachets in all the drawers of this little old tallboy, Bob. Just see how sweet they make the baby's clothes smell."

"They do at that. But I don't see when in the name of Heaven you had time to buy sachets, much less scatter them around."

"I bought them at my lunch hour while you were up on the Hill listening to the debate on Repeal."

"Did you eat any lunch?"

"Some. How do you like those china poodles on the mantel-piece? They're Staffordshire. They came from the Beaver Hat in Middleburg. I wrote Miss Woodward I was on the lookout for some, and she sent me these on approval."

"They've got lots of class. But won't the kid smash them to smithereens if he gets his paws on them?"

"He won't be able to reach that far for years and years. We can move them somewhere else while he's at the destructive stage. But I want them to be his. I want them here in this room when I bring him home."

"Well, I'll tell the world they look swell where you've put them. No one can touch you when it comes to taste, Zoe. Or anything else for that matter. You're tops."

He was increasingly proud of her, and the matter-of-fact way in which she insisted on treating her pregnancy enhanced his respect. He had taken it for granted that all women were exacting and querulous at such times, and the airy references which were the only ones Zoe ever made to her condition caused him to wonder whether other prospective mothers did not generally make a great fuss about nothing. She visited a doctor as a matter of routine, but she never spoke of her symptoms. When Bob asked her about arrangements for the hospital, she told him briefly that they had been made for a long time, and he gathered that they were satisfactory; and she went competently on with her work, training Beverley Bonner, the ornate but able young journalist whom she had earlier added to their office staff to act as Bob's assistant during her own temporary absence. She carried her child well, without clumsiness or self-consciousness, and she did not use it as an excuse for any sort of shirking. It was not without some secret shame for having doubted her, that Bob finally asked her to let him take over a little more than his normal share of their joint journalistic activities, and almost in the same breath muttered that perhaps it wasn't good for her any more to get exhausted or excited, that perhaps he ought to leave her alone until afterwards—it wouldn't be so long now until everything would be all over——

"Oh, Bob, please, don't begin to be 'considerate!' I couldn't stand it if you did anything so out of character! I told you everything would be the same between us as it always has been. I told you the truth, didn't I?"

"I'll say you did. That is, part of it. Because it's been just the

same, in a way, but it's been better. Sharing this as well as the work. It's been marvellous. Maybe I ought to tell you, Zoe—I'm not sorry we're going to have this kid any more. I'd glad. I think it's great. And something else. I'm sorry I ever said you weren't a good sport. You're the best sport I've ever known."

It was not often that he talked to her in this way. Not because it caused him any embarrassment to tell her and show her how much he admired her, but because she herself seemed so light-hearted that he hesitated to speak to her in a sober strain. Brenda Bryant gave a party for her, to which Mrs. Conrad and the "pet Congress woman" and several other celebrities went, besides all the leading newspaper women in the city, who had greatly increased, both in number and in importance: and when Zoe came home from this party, laden with all sorts of ridiculous fluffy little jackets and socks and caps and blankets, she spent the rest of the evening arranging and rearranging these on the guest-room bed, and gloating over them. She did not shut Bob out while she did this; she took it for granted that he would join in the tender merriment.

"We have enough of these gadgets to outfit twins," she said. "I think it would be great fun to have twins, don't you? We could name them 'Flash' and 'Scoop.' That would sound cute."

"Yes, and it would fit. I can just hear all the ribald jests—that hitherto you've been the one to catch a flash and get a scoop, but that this time I've done both—— What are all those scribblings lying over on the corner of the bed beside the package of paper pants? You didn't take notes at the party, did you?"

"No, of course not. Those are Brenda's jingles."

"I didn't know Brenda wrote jingles."

"There are lots of things you don't know about Brenda. She's always written very good jingles. But she outdid herself today. She made us all sit down in a circle with me in the middle, and then she and Beverley went out of the living-room and came back carrying an enormous hamper, full of these presents, which were still tied up in packages, of course. The girls plunked the hamper down beside me and afterwards they stood on either side of it and declaimed. Listen to the first gem they got off!"

Zoe snatched up the scribbled sheets Bob had noticed, and began to declaim herself, interrupted by her little chuckling laugh.

" 'The zippy, zestful, zephyr Zoe
A-Wing where'er they're in-the-know-ey
One would think once, one would think twice,
Is wise to all the who-which-whys,
The glamour gals, the gravy guys,
The valiant knights-politico
Who come and go, and so—and so—
One would think once, one would think twice,
On offering her some sage advice.

And yet—I ask a question solemn—
Will writing Congress by the column
In phrases sparkling, phrases scathing,
Equip a girl for infant-bathing?
Will a leading rôle in the Press Club Frolic
Avail her when the child has colic?
Come, Lisa, let *your* genius burn,
She needs your help at every turn! ”

Bob laughed in his turn. “ And what did Lisa have to offer?”

“ Oh, Lisa had a package full of pamphlets. All those the Children’s Bureau gets out on prenatal care and infant care and so on. She tossed them into my lap one by one and she read a jingle, too. Of course Brenda had written it for her, but she put lots of individuality into it just the same. Wait a sec till I find it. Oh—here it is!”

“ ‘ In Washington we place reliance
On governmental baby science—
Child-psychology, child-nutrition,
In simple words of erudition
From experts in all fields related
Pictorialized, co-ordinated,
Reduced to every-man-and-wife,
To fit this nation’s way-of-life.
With these, my dear, without half tryin’,
You should produce a super-scion! ’ ”

“ Did Mrs. Conrad read anything?”

“ Yes, hers was cute, too.”

“ ‘ The silver-spoon, and fork it’s worn with,
Is most important to be born with,
Or the child will not make Brenda’s pages,
But live obscure at all its ages——’ ”

“ There were a lot more. I loved them all, but I don’t want to be a bore. You must hear Beverley’s, though.”

“ ‘ In future years you’ll love to look
At this most special baby book;
Hand-painted—and it’s done most cleverly
By your devoted side-kick Beverley.
First tooth, first step, first birthday party,
You’ll here record in manner arty,
Also—since common sense we seek—
How much he gains from week to week!
His life will be all gay and glowy,
He will love you as we all do, Zoe!’ ”

“ Bob—they all do love me now, don’t they?”

“ How could they help it, darling?”

“ But they didn’t always.”

“ That was because they didn’t know what you were really like. I’ve always known from the first day I saw you.”

"And the baby—— Do you suppose he'll know what I'm really like and love me from the beginning, too?"

"Of course he will."

"If he does, it'll be almost too good to be true. It'll make me so happy I won't be able to bear it. I didn't know there was so much happiness in the whole world."

This was a new Zoe, one that Bob had never seen before. He tried to reconcile this maternal vision with the elusive girl who had mocked him, and the ruthless reporter whom "nothing frightened and nothing stopped." He did not wholly succeed, and after a time he gave up trying. He did not need to analyze this true and tender woman, who was pouring out her love on their unborn child, which she carried beneath her breast, and whose love for him was greater than ever before, now that at last he had given the child to her. When she had brought it into the world their life would indeed be perfect and complete.

He did not even know when her labour began. He was caught in the turmoil of the Veterans' March as they hurled themselves on the Capitol that day, and when he hurried back to the office to whip his notes into shape and get the stuff on to the wire, Beverley Bonner told him that Mrs. Morton had left early. She had not said anything at all. She had just left. Bob threw down the notes and picked up the telephone. Pearl Gray answered his call.

"No, sah, Miss Zoe ain't been in. She ain't foamed either. Has you done called up de hospital, Mr. Bob?"

"The *hospital*! No, I haven't called the hospital. Why should I?"

"Ah dunno, sah, eggzackly. Ah jus' thought maybe Miss Zoe mought be agoin' dere, one ob dese days, pretty soon, and dat maybe she wouldn't say nuttin' about it, afore she went. You know how Miss Zoe am, Mr. Bob. When she takes de bit between her backteeth, she pulls hard and she don't talk much."

Pearl Gray's deductions proved to be entirely accurate. Yes, Mrs. Morton had been admitted some hours earlier, Bob was informed, when, acting on Pearl's advice, he promptly "foamed" the hospital. Yes, Mr. Morton could come there himself if he wished, though there was no special point in it. Possibly he could see Mrs. Morton for a minute, as she had not yet been taken into the delivery room. But the nurse really could not tell him, since, of course, that was for the doctor to say. The nurse thought that everything was perfectly normal and that probably in a few hours——

Bob picked up his notes again, and thrust them unceremoniously into Beverley Bonner's hands. "Look here," he said curtly, "you have to write tonight's story. This is your chance to show whether all those fancy theories you learned at Columbia can stand up against the trial and error system. I'm going to my wife." Beverley

nodded, took a look at the notes, and nodded again. "It's all right, Mr. Morton, I can manage," she said, with a brevity that bettered his own. Then she added, with kind concern, "I do hope Mrs. Morton won't have a hard time. I do hope everything will go all right."

"Of course she won't have a hard time," he said harshly. "Women don't have a hard time any more when their children are born. Everything's made simple and easy for them. Hasn't anyone told you that?"

Beverley Bonner looked up from the notes, and then glanced quickly down at them again. "Yes, of course," she said quietly. "Yes, I've heard that. I'm very glad you feel so easy in your mind about her."

"Of course I feel easy in my mind about her," Bob shouted. Then he rushed out of the office, slamming the door behind him.

When he reached the hospital he encountered a great deal of red tape, under which he fumed. But at last he was taken in to see Zoe. "Her pains are coming pretty close together," the nurse said, "and it's too bad, because she's still in the first stage. But you can see her for just a minute, between pains." He saw her for just a minute, and he was greatly bewildered at the way she looked. The circles around her eyes were black now, instead of violet, as they had been for months, and her lips were drawn together in a tight line. He wanted to put his arms around her and hold her and comfort her, and wipe away the beads of perspiration which he could see on her forehead. But she did not seem to expect him to stay, even to want him to stay. She smiled, and said something jestingly, he did not quite hear what, and then she gave him a quick kiss and told him to run along, that he was in the way and that she would see him later. He did not want to run along, he wanted to stay with her, so he put his arms around her after all, and when he did that he found that she was shivering. It made him think, for a moment, of the way her lips had quivered under his on their wedding night, and of how he had felt her flinch, and he thought there must be something he could say or do to sweep her beyond the deep waters of dread, as there had been then. But the words he tried to say stuck in his throat, and when she stiffened and drew up her knees, he found that he was trembling, too. He knew that she was suffering horribly, and that the reason she had not cried out was because he was there and she had stifled a scream so that he would not think she had let him down again. And he knew that this time he could not set her free and he felt that he had always known, from the beginning, that this time was coming——

A second nurse had entered the room, her starched skirts rustling as she moved, and the first, towards whom he felt an acute antipathy, spoke to the newcomer in a stage whisper. "The pains are only three minutes apart now," she murmured gloatingly. Then

she came over to Bob. "I really think it would be better if you went into the waiting-room, Mr. Morton," she said in a brisk tone of voice. "Or home if you like. There is really nothing you can do for the patient, and it is much better for her to be quiet. Of course we will keep in touch with you. Everything is perfectly normal, and I believe that in just a few hours——"

"You said that to me before, quite a while ago."

"Well, yes. But with a first baby labour is apt to be a little longer than with the others. Mrs. Morton understands that perfectly, don't you, Mrs. Morton? You're doing splendidly, aren't you? *That's* right! Now, you see, Mr. Morton, your wife agrees with me that it would be better if you went quietly away, perhaps to have a nice hot dinner——"

Bob went quietly away, but only because he was sure that if he stayed where he was he would strangle the nurse. He walked down the corridor to the cheerless little waiting-room, where dog-eared magazines lay on a long wicker table between two wilted rubber plants, and sat there, numbly. For a long time it did not even occur to him that he might smoke, and when it did, he got no further than fumbling for his matches. He realized, vaguely, that there was another man in the room, but this man did not speak to him, nor look at him, and at last the strange dim figure moved away. Bob was alone. Somewhere in the distance a clock was ticking, on and on. Part of the time it ticked loudly and part of the time it ticked faintly. Or so it seemed. And then someone else came into the room. Bob did not instantly grasp that this second apparition was Doctor Hoyt, Zoe's physician.

Bob had always liked Doctor Hoyt. He was clean-cut and business-like. He was not in the least like Doctor Dinsmore. There was no foolishness about him and no philandering. Bob had never minded having Zoe go to Doctor Hoyt's office, whereas he could never have left her with Doctor Dinsmore again after their one brief experience. And Doctor Hoyt inspired confidence for more than one reason. He seemed very competent. Bob had felt Zoe was safe in his hands.

"I've brought you a drink. I'm afraid you need it. I'm afraid you're having a hard time."

"Zoe's having a hard time, isn't she?"

"Yes. I'm very sorry. But I knew it wouldn't be an easy birth. She knew it too."

"I didn't."

"No. She didn't want you to. I don't need to tell you I'll do everything I can for her. But I don't want to operate unless I have to."

"Operate!"

The doctor became briefly technical. Then he forced the glass of whiskey into Bob's hands.

"Look here, you'd better drink this. I'll have you fainting away in a minute. Why don't you go up and see your father for a little while? Or let him come here?"

"I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want to see anyone except Zoe. I want to see her and know she's all right again."

"I'll let you see her as soon as I can. Perhaps that'll be sooner than you think. Buck up."

Bob did not know how long it was before the doctor came back again, or how many other persons went in and out of the waiting-room in the meanwhile. He did not even know whether it was still night or whether it was morning once more until the doctor indirectly told him.

"I've got to operate after all. I can't let her go on any longer like this. She's been in labour eighteen hours already. Try not to worry any more than you can help. I believe she'll come out all right."

"You *believe* she'll come out all right!"

"Yes. I'm not lying to you. I do believe so."

"But you're not sure?"

"No, I'm not sure. Nothing's sure in surgery."

"Please let me see her."

"I can't, Bob. Not now. She wouldn't know you, anyway. I put her under primary anæsthesia a long while ago. Had to. Not that she asked for it. I never saw a woman take her pains so well. But she was wearing herself out. Well, I've got to leave you. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Again Bob lost all sense of time. Someone brought him some coffee and stood over him while he drank it. Afterwards he unconsciously raised his hand to his face and felt its roughness with surprise. So it was a long while since he had shaved—Zoe would hate that—his rough face, and his rumpled linen and everything about him that bespoke negligence, lack of self-respect, lack of self-control. Yet he remembered that morning at Hunter's Green, when he had been unshaven and unkempt and surly, and had suddenly yearned for her, after wilfully shutting her out of his troubled life for days. She had not repulsed him then, in spite of her hurt pride and his disregard of her own fastidious daintiness. And after she had come to him, so fresh and cool on the summer morning, he himself had been as one cleansed and revived—

His thoughts went further back, and dwelt, for the second time since Zoe's labour had begun, upon their wedding night. Yes, he had known then, as he lay and looked at her in the dim dawn, that this night too was before them, when he had asked himself why mating, like maternity, must often be so hard for a woman. If Zoe had never married, if she had never conceived, she would still be free and fearless, ranging a world that was fair beneath her feet, doing the work that she loved. Yet even in his dark turmoil of

spirit, he knew that while this was true it was only half true. By him Zoe had been released for rapture, as he had told himself before. If she had died without this, and the fruit of this, her fate would have been unfulfilled. If she could speak to him now through her anguish, she would still tell him that this was so. Much as she had given him, he had given her still more. The child which had brought her down into the valley of the shadow of death had been the child of her own choice and her own desire, and without him her choice would have been futile, her desire unsatisfied. Whatever this birth cost her, she would never count it too dear——

“I’m afraid I have some very bad news for you.”

He had not heard the doctor come in. Now he lurched to his feet and seized the other man’s hand.

“Zoe——”

“Don’t give up. I’m not sure yet, but I hope she’s going to pull through. She’s back in her bed. You may come in and sit beside her now if you want to. She won’t know you’re there and you mustn’t speak or move. We’ll keep what’s happened from her as long as we can. But I think you’d better be the one to tell her when she has to be told. I couldn’t save the baby. The baby’s dead.”

Bob could not remember exactly when it was that he ceased to be afraid that some day Zoe would say to him, “You didn’t want the baby, anyway. You didn’t mind much because she died.”

A great many days passed, and Zoe did not say anything of the sort, and still the fear that she would did not leave him. She was in the hospital a long time, and every time he went there to see her he said to himself, “Today she will say it.” Then by and by she came home and he said to himself, “She will look at that closed door, the one leading in to the little nursery, which we meant to keep open into our own. And she will say it then.” But still she did not say it. The days lengthened into weeks and gradually the fear died down. And when it was almost dead, she spoke to him, but what she said was not taunting, as he had dreaded and expected. It was different and in a way it was worse.

The garden back of the old house that they had bought was very pleasant. A high brick wall hid it from the street, so that it was very still and secret; and when they sat in it, during the summer evenings, they had something the same sense of beatified solitude which had always descended on them in their dark shared chamber before Zoe’s illness had divided them. Something, but by no means all. Since she had come home from the hospital she had slept in the guest-room, across the hall from their own room—another great square high-studded chamber like their own, the one where she had spread out the baby’s clothes and laughingly read the jingles Brenda Bryant had written; and when he saw her there he thought she looked again as she had before they were married, lost and

lonely in her great bed. He went in to see her every night when he came home and every morning before he started out for work, but they did not cling to each other any more, and they did not even always kiss each other, because kisses brought back too many poignant memories. They were outwardly cheerful and casual and impersonal. But there was still close communion between them just the same. They were aware of it when they were in their garden together, perhaps more than at any other time. Zoe lay on a long wicker couch, and Bob sat beside her in the twilight. The hollyhocks were tall all around the wall and the roses fell in fragrant clusters over the trellises. Pearl Gray brought them their juleps, decorated with sprays of mint from the bed in the corner of the garden, and afterwards she carried their supper out on another tray. While they ate it Bob told Zoe everything that had happened during the day on the Hill and in the office, and they talked over the work, exactly as they had when they had done it together. Bob was managing very well alone, or at least with such help as Beverley Bonner could give him. Beverley was a great credit both to Columbia and to their own bureau. Bob knew this and so did Zoe and they were fair about acknowledging it.

It was after Pearl Gray had cleared away the table and the fireflies had begun to flit among the roses and over the hollyhocks, that Zoe spoke to Bob one night in a way which he instantly knew was portentous.

"Doctor Hoyt has been out here today, Bob."

Doctor Hoyt no longer felt it was necessary for him to see Zoe every day. He came out to Alexandria regularly two or three times a week, but not otherwise, unless she sent for him. Bob answered with interest and with a little pang of concern.

"Yes? But this was the day for him, wasn't it? Everything's all right, isn't it, Zoe?"

"Yes. Everything's all right. But he doesn't think I ought to stay here all summer. He thinks perhaps I ought to get away from the heat, that I'd grow strong faster if I were out of it."

Bob did not answer immediately, and after a moment of silence Zoe went on.

"I told him I'd talk it over with you. Would you mind very much, Bob, if I went away?"

He replied guardedly, afraid of saying the wrong thing. (It had never mattered, in the old days, whether he said the wrong thing or not. He could always make it right afterwards. But now he knew he must be careful.)

"Well, of course I'd miss you. Because I'm afraid I couldn't go with you. One of us would have to stay and look after the office. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, that was what I thought, too. I didn't think of your going with me. I thought you'd stay here."

"Where did Doctor Hoyt think you ought to go, Zoe?"

"Well, he said he'd like to have me go to Europe. Because that would be such a complete change. On a slow boat. So that I'd be at sea a long time."

Bob's heart seemed to turn over in his breast, as it had in the days when she had first spoken of coming to him. And now, for the first time since she had done so, she was speaking of leaving him. But he managed to answer in an offhand way.

"It might not be such a bad idea. If you felt strong enough. Do you feel strong enough, Zoe?"

"Doctor Hoyt thought I'd feel stronger as soon as I got to sea. And he told me not to try to travel around too much or too fast in Europe. Just to go to three or four interesting places and stay in each one of them a fairly long time. But he said I could start writing again, any time I felt like it, as long as I didn't overdo things."

"Of course you mustn't overdo things. But, by and by, when you felt in the mood, you could send home a few pieces for the syndicate. You'd have plenty to write about. There's a lot going on in Europe this summer."

"Yes. And you know we need more foreign news, Bob, to keep our stuff well-balanced. We haven't run any first-hand European dispatches since we started in for ourselves. It's time we did."

"I suppose it is."

"It's all right then, Bob, isn't it, to tell Doctor Hoyt that I'll go? He suggested next week——"

"Yes, it's all right. I can see it's the best thing for you to do. It's best all around. I know that, Zoe."

She never said, "As long as there isn't a baby to keep me at home, I can be a great foreign correspondent after all." But Bob knew that was what she meant. He knew that he alone could not help her any more, as he had at first, and that Zoe was going to be famous now, because the child which she would have given her own life to save had died. Instead of taunting him by telling him she knew he did not mind very much because they had lost it, since he had never wanted it anyway, she was trying to make him believe that she did not mind, at least unbearably, any more herself. And he could not even say, in the face of her brave defiance, "Don't break your heart like this, darling. Perhaps there'll be another child some day. I hope there will. I know there will." How could he say that, or mean it, when the fulfilment of such a hope would engulf her in that unspeakable torment again, for which he would be to blame? He could only sit silent, suffering unspeakably himself.

All that had happened a year and a half before, and in the meantime Bob had lived in the Alexandria house alone a large part of the time, because Zoe had been abroad so much. Her first step,

even at the slow pace at which she had taken it, had been stamped with such success that it was indicated she should go again as soon as possible. And the next trip had been much more successful and much more prolonged. The house seemed very large and empty to Bob when Zoe was gone, but he knew that it seemed emptier still to Zoe when she was at home, that she was glad to be out of it as much as possible. He also knew that she dreaded going through the front door and down the hall alone, because of the pattering sound she did not hear and the little figure she did not see when she did so. That was one of the reasons why she usually contrived to meet him at the office late in the afternoon and drive home with him, no matter how much they had been separated during the course of the day. She did not meet him because she missed him or as a matter of convenience. They both had cars of their own, and their work took them increasingly in different directions. They were both used to that.

Bob and Zoe went up the steps of their beautiful house together and Bob opened the door with his latchkey. As it swung wide the spacious hall was revealed, with the library leading out of it on one side and the drawing-room on the other, and at the rear, between these, another door, leading into the garden. Above this door the stairway rose gracefully, with a few steps at the left leading to a long landing that gave the effect of a gallery, and then a few more steps at the right, leading to the upper hall. (Zoe had said, when they bought the house, that if the baby were a girl she would walk across that gallery as a bride, and come down the steps on Bob's arm, to meet her bridegroom. Well, the baby had been a girl, but she would never lean on her father's arm or meet her bridegroom.) The glittering chandelier, which had been sent from France on purpose for the house, and which had hung there ever since this had been built, shed a lambent light on the exquisite cornice and on the satin-smooth panelling. Against the wall stood a tiptop table, flanked by two Chippendale chairs, a crystal vase of flowers in the centre of it, a silver salver heaped with visiting cards on one side. Bob stopped to glance at the list of telephone calls which Pearl Gray had left on this table, between the hurricane lamps. Zoe went on into the library, and picked up the mail which Pearl Gray had arranged in such neat significant rows over the spotless blotter covering the small writing-desk that divided the precious bookcase. Bob heard her laugh and went into the library himself.

"Mind telling me what the joke is?"

"Love to tell you. We've been invited to dinner at the French Embassy. The old weaver stood up for his own rights at last. Poor Isabell!"

"Poor Isabell!" Bob said after her, laughing too. But to himself he said, "Poor Zoe!" and there was no laughter in his heart when

he did so. Because he knew she did not care at all about going to the French Embassy for dinner, in spite of the dazzling way she would look, and the insistence with which everyone would crowd around to listen to what she said about her latest experiences in France and England. He knew she would be much happier if she could go quietly upstairs and sit in a fire-lit room and hold a little child in her arms. She was free to "go out and play" with him after all, as he had insisted she must be. But that was because there was no baby for her to play with at home.

CHAPTER XXII

Bob was not in the least surprised because Zoe stole the show at the French Ambassador's dinner. It was the sort of thing she did all the time now, in an apparently effortless way that made it doubly effective.

Her success, as he saw it, had two main sources. The first was her looks. She had always been sufficiently striking, even when she had no time to spend on prinking and no money to spend on dress; now that she had both she was the personification of *chic*. But though she attracted immediate attention wherever she went she could not have held this on looks alone; she did it, he said, on her manner, which, like her clothes, got better and better all the time. She never monopolized conversation, even when a party was obviously planned with a view towards encouraging her to do so; but her talk was always timely and intriguing. She had learned to draw on her personal and professional experiences in such a way that she was never at loss for a witticism, an anecdote or an example; and the impression that she was in the forefront of women "in the know," both at home and abroad, had become deep-rooted. Even the first few articles she had written from Europe, when she went there after the loss of her baby, had secured a substantial success; she attended the Twenty-ninth Session of the World Peace Conference in Geneva and the later Conference of Danubian States at Stresa; the demand of the delegates for execution of the Kellogg Pact and the formation of a *modus operandi* for the Tardieu-MacDonald Formula both became vital and urgent as she presented them. The following summer she had covered the Economic Conference in London with such comprehensive clarity that her dispatches had won widespread recognition. A year later, with what Bob called a "flair for funerals," she had been in Vienna when Dollfuss was done to death, in Berlin when Von Hindenburg died, and in Marseilles when Alexander of Yugoslavia was assassinated. She had followed the strike against the Leroux Government; she had seen the Doumergue Cabinet survive the crisis which ensued, and had analyzed and interpreted the later one in which Doumergue was superseded by Flandin. It was her comments on these conditions in France which had first attracted the attention of the French Ambassador, and had resulted in his careful perusal of the earlier and lighter articles she had written when she was touring his country in her car and sojourning in the Rue Madame. He had come to feel that here, decidedly, was a foreign correspondent with whom to be reckoned. In this respect, if in no other, he was in accord with his

colleague from Spain, who had read her accounts of the abortive uprisings in Catalonia, and his colleague from Germany, who had read her accounts of Hitler's suppression of the Reich Presidency. Now that she was back in Washington, there were not evenings enough in the week to give would-be hosts and hostesses a chance to entertain her at dinner, secure in the comfortable consciousness that they would thus provide the most illuminating and zestful entertainment possible for all their other guests, besides enjoying themselves immensely at their own parties.

Bob did not begrudge Zoe any of this, partly, perhaps, because his own success, though less startling, had meanwhile been so steady. He had made many friends as his father's secretary; he was trusted and liked, both on the Hill and in the Government departments; this cordiality of feeling and closeness of contact stood him in good stead when he and Zoe founded their Washington bureau and began to syndicate their "Capital Kaleidoscope." Many doors which might have been closed entirely, or opened only in a gingerly way to her, by those who still had rankling memories of the merciless way in which she had dealt with nepotism and lobbying, were flung wide for Bob to enter in; and he always had, or took, the time for the drink and the smoke and the small talk which she could never seem to spare. His youthful predilection for company and clothes which were rather loud had proved to be only a precursor to the faculty of being an exceptionally good mixer, of dealing successfully and sympathetically with "low-brows" and of keeping the common touch in any group. Men high in public office who had risen from the ranks, and Bureau Heads who were still fumblingly learning the ropes, liked his conviviality and his unaffectedness in the same way that they respected his dependability. Often they called him up to tell him when something was going to break, which he himself, lacking Zoe's nose for news, had failed to ferret out. Since it was bound to be published, anyway, they said, he might as well have it. They believed in giving the best fellow the best breaks.

Besides holding up his end in the syndicate all the time and carrying a double burden when Zoe was in Europe, Bob had also managed to keep on with his series on Southern homes and gardens for the *Examiner*, stifling the feeling that the pieces really fitted better into the reporting of a woman than of a man. At first this had been hard for him to do, as in the case of the earlier articles on the organizations with headquarters in Washington. But the movie sale of "Memory More True than Mine" had been both a salve and a stimulus. As long as he shouldered his share of the family load financially, as long as Zoe's field of action was no more intensive than his own even though more widespread, he did not need to be thin-skinned about any sort of work that he did; and in view of his continued success he was much more substantially paid for

his newspaper articles than he had been at first. The proceeds from the pieces on homes and gardens made a "back log"—as Zoe herself had called it—that grew bigger and better all the time. He banked it carefully.

It so happened that an opening for which he had long angled in vain, came to him, unexpectedly, on the morning of the dinner at the French Embassy. One of the finest places in Piedmont had passed into the possession of a crusty old widower named Ferdinand Wynn, who would permit neither reporters nor photographers to come there; but Ronnie had finally persuaded this elderly curmudgeon, to whom she sometimes sold horses, that Bob Morton was "different," that it was a sin and a shame not to have King's Crossing represented in his series, and that it would be best to get hold of Bob at once, before he changed his mind about wanting to include it. Bob had been roused by a long-distance call before six that morning, and told that if he still desired to come to King's Crossing he had better be on his way. He had not waked Zoe, who still occupied the big chamber originally planned as the guest room, across the hall from the one they had once shared and which they now designated as "his." She had slept very badly after the loss of her baby, and Doctor Hoyt had felt that until this condition cleared up, it was better there should be no risk of disturbance because of a second presence in her room. The condition did not clear up as rapidly as he had expected, or at least as rapidly as he had said he expected; and by the time Zoe had returned from abroad, she had grown so accustomed to solitude at night, and so dependent on it for such rest as she could snatch, that Bob could see for himself, without the superfluous advice of a doctor, that she must not be deprived of it. Anything would be better than the breakdown that still seemed imminent or even tension of any sort which might lead to one; and she came dangerously close to it, after the operation which—Bob was tardily told—both she and Doctor Hoyt had known all along she would have to undergo, as soon as she was strong enough, because of the wreckage wrought by her abnormal labour. It was nothing but a "repair job," they said lightly enough; but Zoe showed even less resilience after it than after her confinement. It was spring again before she remotely resembled herself, and then, as soon as she could keep on her feet, she went back to Europe, and their second separation was automatically prolonged. Bob, having carefully consulted Doctor Hoyt in the meantime, partially put an end to it at this stage; and she had never given her husband the feeling that he was obtrusive or unwelcome when he came to her, and once or twice she even reminded him jokingly that she had never let him down a second time. But the very fact that he had to make a point of seeking her out robbed their relationship of spontaneity as relentlessly as his fear of upsetting her or involving her robbed it of abandon and

joyousness. They were still close to each other in many ways; they continued to be comrades and they came to be colleagues. But they had ceased to be carefree lovers. In the last analysis, the loss of their child was less of a tragedy than the loss of their unity.

A fierce feeling of resentment and deprivation because this was so swept over Bob afresh, as he slipped a note under Zoe's door, after getting in touch with the faithful Beverley, and making sure that the office routine would go forward smoothly during his absence. But the note itself betrayed none of his bitter turmoil of spirit. He would be glad if Zoe would slip down to the State Department that morning, he said; something might come up at Ambrose Estabrook's conference on the European debt situation or the Japanese oil monopoly, that it would be best for one of them to cover personally; and he took it for granted that she would go to the White House. Otherwise Beverley could look after almost everything. He would be back for dinner. But the time to catch bears was when they were around, as she had so often reminded him herself. The bear at King's Crossing had finally *come* around, and he, Bob, was off to see the crabbed creature before a change of heart could set in.

Bob was back in Alexandria, satisfied, and justifiably so, with the results of his excursion, in time to dress, but with none to spare. He did not see Zoe until she came out of her own room, already swathed in an evening wrap of green and silver brocade, with a big blue fox collar, to which was pinned the orchid that, in spite of his haste, Bob had not forgotten to order for her that morning. Pearl Gray's niece, who was unbelievably named Opal, and who had been added to their household staff, was bearing up beamingly in the rear. Opal always helped Zoe dress for great occasions now, and though she never made the ritual of it that Isabel had done in palmier days, this was only because she was less lazy and luxurious by nature. She shed one set of clothes, bathed briskly, and got into formal dress with almost uncanny dispatch, considering the effect of care and finish which she achieved. But then Bob did not bother her any more by teasing her to let him see her do her hair, or shouting to her when she was in the shower. On this occasion he did not even suggest that she should undo her coat, and let him have a glimpse of what was beneath it. They were a little late as it was, so he only said, "All ready?" rather superfluously, because, of course, it was evident that she was. Then Opal, still beaming, helped him adjust his white scarf and get into his overcoat and handed him his silk hat and white gloves before opening the front door, and he and Zoe went down the front steps together and got into the car, the door of which was also held open for them. Opal was married, and her husband, Zally, was also a member of the household. He took care of the garden and the furnace, and kept the windows and brass and silver bright and shining, and waited

at table. He also drove the car when Bob and Zoe went to parties, so that there would be no parking problem for them, and so that their good clothes would not get rumpled. They sat on the back seat and talked, rather inconsequentially.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get back to the office and come home with you. But once old Wynn got going I thought I'd never escape from his clutches."

"It was all right. I'm glad you cornered him at last. There really wasn't anything doing around town today. I don't believe Estabrook will let loose on the oil for another week at least. He was as cold as a clam this morning and as close. Conrad wasn't talking either—just being very bright and merry over nothing. He wears me down when he acts like that even more than when he goes on like a babbling brook. I was glad to get home. But then a real Southern gentlewoman came to see me and stayed for over an hour. She wanted to talk to me about opening the house for the benefit of St. Paul's Church. I've told Opal to say I'm not at home if one of her kind comes again. I haven't time for droppers-in."

"Well, I wish you might have. After all, we do live in Virginia now, and you'd like these people after you got to know them. I do, anyway. But I realize you need more time to yourself. I'm afraid you're trying to cover too much ground. I oughtn't to leave you with such an ungodly lot to do as I did today. But no one would guess you were tired, to see you, who didn't know. You certainly look like a million dollars, Zoe. Is this the new lipstick you were telling me about that matches the new nail polish?"

"Yes. How do you like it?"

"I'd say it was pretty smooth. But let's see." He leaned over and kissed her, being careful to do so lightly, for he had learned better than to spoil well applied make-up just before a party. "Tastes as good as it looks," he said, laughing. "Now let's see the paws, too. I'm glad you don't go in for that kind of colour that makes them look as if you'd been butchering. This is just right. Did the scent come with the rest of the outfit?"

"No, that was separate. It's nice of you to be so interested, Bob."

"Well, the scent's good, too. Every day in every way you're getting better and better— Incidentally, the other gal reporters seem to be getting on to it. What's this Beverley is saying about their wanting you to run for the Presidency of the Women's National Press Club?"

"I don't know what she's saying. I wish she wouldn't say anything. Because the idea's got to be nipped in the bud. It would have meant a lot to me if they'd wanted me five years ago. Now it doesn't mean a thing. I haven't time to bother with the Press Club. Or energy either."

"I said you were working too hard. Maybe we'd better get some-

one else into the office—another man this time. We could swing it all right financially.”

“Yes, and then he’d probably fall for Beverley and we’d have the place riddled with romance and nothing would get done. What’s the matter, Bob?”

“Nothing. I didn’t think about a romance, that’s all. I reckon you’re right. I reckon we’d better get along the way we are, or with just another stenographer. That would release Beverley.”

“Yes, it would. It’s not a bad idea.”

They did not talk much more during the drive into town. They were both tired and both preoccupied. When they separated, just inside the entrance of the Embassy, to leave their wraps in the cloakrooms on either side of the front door, Bob was waylaid by a determined “alphabet” official with a bright new axe to grind about the purchase of Government securities. When he finally escaped Zoe was already waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, talking to the Roumanian Minister’s wife. In Madame Larescu’s presence he could hardly comment on his wife’s appearance, but he had never seen her in so amazing a dress, or one that made her seem so irresistibly lovely. For the second time that day a fierce pang of resentment swept over him at the thought of their estrangement.

The dress was made of gauze, so soft and silky that it looked like a fairy fabric, and its tints, even more than its texture, were dazzling. All the colours of the rainbow were shaded in it, so subtly and skilfully that its iridescence was as baffling as that of a real rainbow; it was impossible to tell where red had begun to merge into orange, yellow into green and blue into violet. The long skirt was very full, the V-shaped bodice very low both in front and behind and entirely sleeveless. The dress had a jewelled girdle of multi-coloured stones and narrow jewelled straps over the shoulders. Zoe had on long earrings and a high comb which matched the girdle and the shoulder straps, but there was nothing around her white neck or her slim wrists. When she walked into the drawing-room she made every other woman present look drab, dowdy and insignificant, and Bob knew that was exactly what she had intended to do, both when she selected the dress in Paris and when she put it on for the first time that night.

She was instantly surrounded by men. Being without official rank, it was inevitable that her dinner partner should have none either; but as if to make up for the imminent loss of time at table, the most important functionaries present gathered around her with the least possible delay. Bob lost sight of her, almost completely, for a long time, during the course of which he had ample opportunity to reflect that it was only seven years since he had been to his first Washington party, in a house located less than a block away, which was now let for lodgings, that then it was Isabel—now

standing in the background—who had been the centre of attraction, and that Zoe had waited until late in the evening to waylay Helen in order to get crumbs of news about it; decidedly the whirligig of time did bring about its own revenges, he thought, as he occasionally caught a glimpse of iridescent froth, billowing out beyond beautifully cut black trousers, or heard the little chuckling laugh that he loved in a momentary pause punctuated by outbursts of masculine appreciation. That was all he did see or hear, however. He did not have a chance to talk to Zoe again until they were back in the car, and then, of course, Zally was sitting in the front seat; but neither Bob nor Zoe was especially self-conscious about his presence any more.

"You certainly were a knock-out, Zoe. I do hand it to you."

"Thanks. This dress is effective, isn't it? I didn't have as much competition as I do sometimes, though. But I do think most of the women around town have better figures and most of the men more brains than when we first began to go out to dinner together. Have you noticed that there aren't as many overstuffed widows in evidence as there used to be? Their places have all been taken by streamlined divorcees."

Bob laughed. "There's something in what you say. I drew a divorcee myself, as you probably saw—that sleek-looking little Bassanta girl. She came out the same year as Helen, and she's had two husbands since. I understand she's got Senator Hyde on the string now. He was about the only man at the dinner who looked at anyone but you, Zoe."

"I've been busily discouraging him for quite a while. I'm glad it's worked at last."

"So am I—— There's a story going the rounds that Marie Bassanta's coloured maid, who doesn't sleep in, found him very cosily installed at Marie's apartment when she arrived to work the other morning."

"A case of too many cooks spoiling the brothel, perhaps."

"Zoe, I hope you haven't told that wisecrack to anyone but me. It's a mighty good one but just as well kept quiet."

Zoe laughed without making a direct answer, and before she spoke there was a subdued snicker from the front seat. "Well, I never thought Hyde was so hot myself, but whatever he does his wife certainly has it coming to her for being such an awful fool. Did you hear her telling everyone who would listen that she left the line in the East Room yesterday and walked out of the White House because Mrs. Conrad kept the company invited for tea waiting fifteen minutes? Mrs. Conrad had been to the funeral of someone she cared a lot about, but of course that didn't make any difference to Hide-and-Seek."

"I didn't hear her talking about it, but I'm sure the story won't lose anything as told by Zoe Wing in 'Capital Kaleidoscope' to-

morrow—you're rather reverting to your original style, aren't you, Zoe? There's been a good deal of venom in some of your stuff lately."

"Why shouldn't there be, when specimens like Hyde hand it to me with the caviare on a silver platter?"

"No reason. Except that I thought you'd decided to drop it because you preferred to—— Which of the men who were there tonight would fit into your category of 'more brains'?"

"Well, Rosenthal for one, though it's a mystery to me how the elegant Isabel ever let him slip in. He ought to shave three times a day, and stop buying his suits at bargain basement sales—or renting them, whichever it is he does. And Gleason is nobody's fool—I think he'll probably be kicked upstairs in the State Department pretty soon because he's been clever enough to manoeuvre and manipulate until he's got poor old Carruthers discredited. Then, of course, we might mention our host himself. After all, he did ask us to the party and we were glad to go to it. We could give him some kind of a hand. He's shrewd and sensible if he is obnoxious."

"I believe a guy named Shakespeare said something once about damning with faint praise. You're good at that yourself, Zoe—except that in your case it's apt to be barbed praise. Now René de Blonville is an awfully nice chap. I should think you might give him a real hand."

"Yes, I always liked René de Blonville. I used to see a good deal of him in Paris. I'm glad to see him again. I doubt whether Isabel is though."

Silence fell between them momentarily again, as it was still apt to do when any reference was made to Paris as Zoe had known it before her marriage. Bob broke it by saying something more about Isabel.

"The lovely social secretary at the French Embassy seems to be a great success. Poor Pauline would be pretty well lost without her, I'm afraid, and I gather the Ambassador thinks she has all kinds of good points, even though he does kick over the traces sometimes and ask people like us to dinner."

"Oh yes—social secretaries, like streamlined divorcees, are having their innings nowadays. You probably know that another of Helen's little playmates, Alicia Rossel, is with the Italians. Candace says she's doing very well, too."

"I had quite a talk with Candace tonight. She's as blooming and buxom as ever, isn't she?"

"Yes, she's the only one of the crowd she used to train with that's been able to put up a bold front and manage to pretend that the good old times are still going on. She's even contrived to hang on to her house. Vittorio doesn't care whether it's heated or not, and Candace doesn't care whether it's clean or not, so without little details like those to bother them, the cost of maintenance is greatly

reduced, and it makes a very presentable residence for the Councillor of the Italian Embassy and his contessa. But most of the old grey mares and their stables ain't what they used to be. It's funny, isn't it, that the Towers should be let for lodgings, and Mrs. Burgess's old brick monstrosity should be torn down to make room for a parking lot, and that Mrs. Rutherford should be sending her ponderous junk to Sloane's auction rooms and moving to a two-by-four, where she'll be lucky if she can get a day-bed in beside her one remaining whatnot."

"I don't think it's so awfully funny. I feel sort of sorry for all those old girls. It isn't as if they'd been young enough to adapt themselves to changes. I'm mighty glad Mother got off easier than most of them."

Again there was a short silence. Zoe had never been disagreeable or vindictive in her dealings with Mrs. Morton, and she had been genuinely pleased when her mother-in-law's decision to emulate several other Congressional ladies by becoming her husband's secretary had freed Bob for the news bureau. But there was no love lost between the two women, and Bob was only too well and too unhappily aware of this. He waited for Zoe to break the silence this time.

"Speaking of Helen's little playmates like Marie Bessanta and Alicia Rossel," she said at length, "makes me think of Helen herself. She's back in Mexico again. I had a long letter from her today. I read it while I was dressing. That's what delayed me."

"I wondered what it could have been. I didn't think it was the large variety of underclothes you were putting on, judging from the eventual effect."

"You wrong me. I have on both hoops and stockings. But as I started to say, when you so rudely interrupted me, I'm afraid the gilt has begun to come off Helen's gingerbread."

"You don't mean that Alfredo——"

"Oh, Alfredo's still the complete answer to love's young dream and always will be. He's one in a million. I don't believe he's ever given her an unhappy moment. Which is more than I can say for any American husband I know of."

"Gosh, Zoe, you're full of dirty digs tonight! What have I done now?"

"Nothing. Don't put on shoes unless you're sure they'll fit, and, above all, don't get sore feet doing it. You know perfectly, though, you're not a story-book hero like Alfredo. You never pretended to be."

"No, I'm just the plain product of the crass South-west, tagging along behind the glamour girl of the Fourth Estate."

"How's that for a dirty dig, I'd like to know? Suppose we call quits for a while, as far as we're personally concerned, and talk about Helen instead. I think Alfredo's still ace high with her and

always will be. But I think his family has begun to pall on her a little. Especially his mother. That does sometimes happen, you know. I think the poor kid is lonely. A bit frightened, too, maybe."

"*Frightened?* Of what?"

"Oh, nothing specific. Life in general when it's real and earnest. And mother-in-law's rather gloomy view of it. And the fact that it isn't possible for her to have friends of her own, and that she'd like to and thinks she might even need one some time."

"Why isn't it possible for her to have friends, for the luva Mike?"

"Well, it seems Guy Grenville is now stationed in Mexico. And that, according to Mother Terraza, is a menace to the sanctity of the home."

"I wish you'd talk more sense, Zoe."

"I wish some people had more. I gather that old lady Terraza hasn't any. About Guy and Helen, at least. You can read the letter yourself. In fact, I think you'd better. Helen wants us to come down for the Christmas holidays."

"It might not be such a bad plan, if we could make it."

"Yes, but can we? With Congress opening in January, we'd have to be back by the third. And you know how things pile up just before."

"We could fly and save a lot of time that way. If Conrad will just come out with a statement about those changes he's planning in his relief programme and other governmental shifts, there probably wouldn't be much to keep us guessing, now that the senatorial elections are all safely over."

"Over anyway. Let's not try to say how safely. I don't feel the destinies of the nation are too secure in the hands of the gentleman whose political experience, so far, has been confined to the dental parlour where he's practised 'painlessly,' according to the placards on the building where he's hung out. I understand he's likely to be late in arriving on the Hill, because he's been delayed by the necessity of overseeing the removal of the signs showing many-pronged molars with long roots against a red background, and full double plates, guaranteed to fit or your money back when you get a new set."

"Zoe, you're incorrigible."

"It's the gospel truth. So is the story about the solon who's just staged a sensational reunion with his long-estranged spouse. She's belatedly remembered how ardently she always loved him, now that he's come romping in at the polls with a safe majority. I met her myself in Paris, several years ago. She was travelling with a gentleman who was rather vaguely introduced as her second cousin. Of course, now that we're living in Virginia, we'll have to get used to cousins of all kinds. But, believe it or not, in Paris, where they're supposed to be liberal, the lady caused quite a stir. An invitation to dinner at the Embassy was recalled at the last moment and——"

"Don't you ever find anything you can commend in the history of a senatorial family?"

"Well, John Stone of Massachusetts is what's generally known as a gentleman, even if he hasn't got any sex appeal, and there's a quiet man named Morton from Arkansas who has a son I've always rather liked."

"Thank you for those kind words. They're the first I've heard you utter tonight. But you really have me sold on this Mexican idea."

"Well, we can look up flying schedules. We go from here to Brownsville, don't we, and then change?"

"I believe so. I'll find out. It would be fun if we could get off, Zoe. Do you realize we've never had a trip together, except for that one week-end in New York? I've been wishing for a long time we could go somewhere. I suppose it might as well be Mexico as any other place."

His feeling that it had better be Mexico than anywhere else became definite when he read Helen's letter after they reached home that night. He began to consult timetables early the next morning, and to confer with Zoe on the best way of clearing their calendar. Eventually he overrode her objection and overcame his own to having another man in the office, when they discovered, somewhat to their surprise, that Bert Scruggs was tired of the job he had and would like to come to them. With such a veteran as Bert at the helm, and with such a steady standby as Beverley Bonner had now become, they had really no sound reason for hesitation. They left Washington by air on the morning of December twenty-second, spent the night in Brownsville, and arrived in Mexico City at noon the next day.

Their first feeling about it was one of unalloyed enchantment. The mingled squalor and splendour of the surroundings into which they had literally been catapulted, with no preparation other than the swift glimpses of stark fantastic scenery viewed from the plane, had a dazzling effect upon them; there had been no opportunity to become gradually accustomed to Mexico's exotic aspects, and therefore these were the more overwhelming. Whisked rapidly from the airport through a medley of slit-like streets, expansive plazas and wide avenues, they had already been beset by whining beggars and importunate vendors a dozen times before they reached the Casa Catalina. Lottery tickets had been thrust into their faces and great baskets of glowing fruits shoved into their laps; every stoplight was the signal for some such experience. In the course of the same ride there had been the thrill of traversing the teeming Zocalo with the indomitable façade of the ancient cathedral guarding over it, of seeing Chapultepec Palace rising majestically above the noble trees that cover the eminence which it crowns, and of gliding through

the verdant quietude of its encircling park. Long before the car had stopped in front of the iron-bound door, which swung slowly open at some unseen signal, to admit them to the portal and the patio, they had reached, instinctively, for each other's hands, and were sitting with these tightly clasped, in the first shared impulsive excitement they had felt since either could remember.

Alfredo, completely unchanged in appearance, had met them at the airport, and, with the same cordial courtesy he had always shown them, had welcomed them to his city and his home. His father had come with him, which they recognized as an additional gesture of consideration; a grave, spare man, formal but friendly, who pointed out the sights as they went along, turning from the front seat, where he sat beside the smartly uniformed chauffeur, in order to do so, while his son sat beside Bob and Zoe. Elena had waited at home to receive them, Alfredo and Don Luiz both explained; they had not wanted the car to seem crowded to their visitors, especially as they were uncertain how much baggage would be brought. Not daring to look at each other, Bob and Zoe squeezed hands again. The squeeze was mutually understood to mean that in their opinion it would have been much better if the chauffeur, or even Don Luiz, had been left at home, so that Helen could have come; besides, all their luggage had fitted commodiously into the enormous compartment at the rear, and in such a sumptuous car three could have ridden as easily on the front seat as on the back seat. They still hoped—and though they had not managed to actually signal this each was sure that the other felt the same way—that they would be taken straight through the patio to the second portal, and that they would go quietly into the *apartamento* and see Helen alone before they met the rest of the Terrazas. But they were doomed to disappointment in this respect also. Helen was waiting for them at the foot of the great staircase with the tiled risers and the star-shaped lamps, directly inside the entrance; beside her were standing her mother-in-law and Faustino, the second son; and directly behind them, in an attentive row, were drawn up Maria, Michaela, Yolanda, Carlota, Lupe and Enrico.

Helen detached herself to come forward and throw her arms around the necks of Bob and Zoe, with her old fondness and her old artlessness; but almost instantly she freed herself from their own hearty hugs to present them properly to Doña Amelia and to her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. The young men both bowed from the waist and kissed Zoe's hand, as Don Luiz had done at the airport, before enveloping Bob in an *embraso* for which he was entirely unprepared; the girls, after nodding smilingly to Bob, kissed Zoe warmly on both cheeks. Doña Amelia, after indicating that she expected Bob to salute her in the same way that her husband and her sons had saluted Zoe, kept her own kisses cool and condescending; but she spoke to her guests most hospitably. The

comida—the midday meal—would be ready whenever they cared to partake of it, she said; and after it they must not fail to have a siesta. This was important at all times, but doubly so for new arrivals, who did not always realize the strain which the altitude put upon them, or make allowances for it until too late. The Mortons must guard against any undue fatigue for the first two or three days; after that, if everything went well, there would be no danger of complications. And, before her guests prepared for siestas, she thought it well to suggest that possibly they would be more comfortable upstairs, where she could provide them with a spacious suite and a terrace overlooking the garden; in the *apartamento*, as Elena had probably told them, there was only one guest-room, and not a large one at that. They must feel perfectly free, of course, to decide for themselves. But she could not help believing—

“It’s very kind of you, Doña Amelia. But we’re going to be here such a short time, unfortunately—and of course we want to see as much as we can of our sister. So I’m sure you’ll understand if we choose the *apartamento*.”

Neither Bob nor Helen looked directly at Zoe while she was speaking; but they both knew that Doña Amelia, who was meeting her eyes steadily, saw a spark there. Later, when there was a chance, both of them spoke to Zoe about it.

“Darling, I was so afraid you’d choose the suite. And that would have meant I’d hardly have seen you at all. You can be comfortable in this room, can’t you?”

“Of course I can, sweetness. It’s a lovely room. And I’ve been dying to stay in the *apartamento* myself ever since you first wrote me about it. I want to see all of it. But I want to see you most of all. Let me have a good look at you.”

“Do you think I’ve changed, Zoe? Do you think I look older and—and different? I feel older and different.”

“I think you look lovely. Naturally you’ve grown up. And I hadn’t expected to see you dressed—well, quite so formally, shall we say? But it’s very becoming, isn’t it, Bob?”

His answer came readily enough, in the affirmative. But later, after the enormous dinner and the exchange of compliments and drinking of toasts entailed by their arrival had finally come to an end, and he and Zoe were alone for the siesta period, he spoke much more candidly.

“It was swell of you to speak up the way you did, Zoe. I could see it meant everything to the poor kid. Gosh, she doesn’t dare call her soul her own, does she? I wish we could get her away from here—but then I suppose she’d cry her eyes out for Alfredo. She’s still crazy about him, I can see that. Whoever it was said Latins were lousy lovers didn’t know what he was talking about. They can give us poor, dumb Anglo-Saxons cards and spades on that

score—— Say, are you really sure I won't be too much in the way? It's a long time since you've had me cluttering up your room."

"I guess I can stand it, for a week. If I find I can't sleep in the four-poster, I'll crawl out of it and cuddle up on that day-bed. Isn't it a beauty, though? Just look at those wooden swans forming the headboard. I never saw a design like that before. I wish I could find a twin to it for our house. You know, Bob, this really is the most wonderful place I've ever been in. Nothing in Europe can touch it."

Her appreciation of the charm and distinction of the furnishings and ornaments surrounding her was so intense that it diverted her, momentarily, from the more sinister aspects of the Casa Catalina, though she had not failed to observe these. Bob watched her, wonderingly and tolerantly, as she laid a caressing hand on the graceful heads of the wooden swans and let it glide slowly down over the brocade coverlet. He had never wholly shared, or even wholly understood, her unquenchable thirst for beauty; but he was glad that here, at least, it was temporarily satisfied. She began to walk around the room, scrutinizing the pictures, smelling the flowers, and fingering one small, rare *objet d'art* after another. At last he took a little silver filagree crown, which she was examining with care, gently away from her, and put his arm around her waist with something of his old persuasiveness.

"Look here, we've been told we ought to lie down. It seems a funny thing for a man to do in broad daylight, but people who live in a place themselves usually know what they're talking about. And you need some sleep, anyway—you were up awfully early this morning. Don't let me hear any more nonsense, either, about the day-bed. I'll take that. You climb into the big four-poster before it gets a minute later."

There had been an ulterior motive of definite design in the back of Zoe's mind when she made the opposite suggestion; but she saw that Bob, formerly so intuitive as far as she was concerned, had failed to grasp it, and she decided not to precipitate an argument at the moment. After all, since they were both in a relaxed holiday mood, enjoying themselves together, despite their underlying anxiety about Helen, it was quite possible that she might get her own way, almost automatically, before they left Mexico, especially if Bob were disarmed by her tractability now. She "climbed" in as directed, and almost instantly sank into a deep refreshing slumber. It was dark when she waked, and she sat up in bewilderment, wondering if she had slept straight through to the middle of the night. The aluminium dial of her travelling clock, which Bob had thoughtfully placed on the bedside table, reassured her; it was only a little after seven, and she could hear the murmur of voices in the *salita* beyond, subdued, as if the speakers were being

careful not to disturb her, but friendly and intimate. She dressed rapidly and went out, to find Bob and Helen and Alfredo gathered around a table already set for *merienda*.

"I've had the most wonderful sleep," she said happily. "Really, I can't remember when I've slept that way. I hope I haven't upset anybody's plans by being so lazy."

Alfredo hastened to reassure her, as he handed her a cup of spicy chocolate. They had no plans, he said, which could not conform to her comfort, which was their first consideration. But now that she was rested, they might map out a tentative programme, so that she and Bob could get the most out of their visit. He and Elena had hesitated to commit them to anything that evening, fearing fatigue on their part; however, there was a reception at the Chinese Legation to which they might go later on, if they all felt in the mood when the time came; or his parents would be delighted to have them pass at least an hour or so upstairs, before they retired for the night. His sisters were putting the last touches on the family *nacimiento*, and they might enjoy helping with its construction, or at least watching this—the little figures of the Holy Family and the friendly animals were very ancient and exquisite, delicately carved and softly coloured, and Maria Michaela had some skill in arranging them in their miniature stable. He and Elena at least would have to devote the next evening to the family, as this was the Vigil of Christmas, which they all kept together before going to Midnight Mass. But Bob and Zoe had been invited to the American Embassy for the Christmas Eve celebration, which would be very gay, and again they must feel free to make the choice which would result in the most pleasure for them.

"I'm afraid you'll have to make a whole succession of choices," Helen broke in, "because everyone wants so much to see you and entertain for you—the Mexican press and the foreign correspondents and——"

"And the Embassy crowd and country club set and the big business men?"

"Yes. That's it. Don't you ever forget anything, Zoe? You can't go to all these parties if you're to have any time for visiting with us and do any sightseeing at all. It's a shame you can't stay longer. For, of course, you mustn't come to Mexico and go away again without hitting the high spots, anyway. If you try to, you'll be pestered to death when you get back to Washington, by having people say, 'You don't mean to tell me you didn't even go to Taxco!'—or Puebla or Morelia or whatever their favourite happens to be—— 'Why, what *did* you see?'"

"I'm very good at exterminating pests like that, Helen. I've had a lot of experience at it now, because, of course, I never see what the average tourist thinks I ought to, in Europe. I think I can develop an equally good technique in regard to Mexico. Anyhow,

let me worry about that. Bob and I have come to see you and Alfredo and to have a good time together ourselves while we're doing it. This is our week off. We don't need to please anyone but ourselves in the way we spend it. Besides, if we don't see everything we ought to this time, that'll give us a good excuse for coming back again."

"Oh, if you only will! But in the meantime you must tell us how you *want* to spend this week."

"I think it would be fun to go to the Chinese Legation tonight and skip the visit upstairs. Then tomorrow evening we can see the *nacimiento* after it's all finished and observe the Vigil, and go to church with the family. I don't believe Bob's ever been to Midnight Mass, have you, Bob? Well, it's worth doing. I remember at the Madeleine, in Paris——" Zoe paused, so briefly that only Bob noticed she had done it, and went on, with renewed sprightliness: "We can leave cards at the Embassy and get in touch with some of the press in the meanwhile during the daytime. And decide then what we'll do after Christmas. How would that strike you?"

"I think it would be perfect! Oh, Zoe, you're even more wonderful than you used to be, and I didn't think that was possible. You can't imagine what it means to me to have you here!"

"Well, we think it's grand, too. Is there a moon? Could we catch a glimpse of the garden by moonlight before we start for the party? Or isn't there time?"

It seemed that there was a moon and that there was time. They all walked down the long paved alley as far as the shrine together, and afterwards sat in the pavilion, under the big bell. It was much chillier than Zoe had supposed it would be, considering the heat of the day; and presently Bob left to get a wrap for her, accompanied by Alfredo, who insisted that he must be shown the way, and that besides, Elena needed a wrap, too. When they had gone, Helen put her arms around Zoe's neck again, in a more lingering way than she had done that afternoon.

"It does mean everything to me," she repeated intensely. "To have you and Bob both, of course. But especially you. I don't mean that I love you any more than I do Bob. Of course, you wouldn't expect me to. But to have a *woman* to speak to again, the way I can speak to you—— There's a big business man, a Mr. Walker, who said something to me once that made me rather angry at the time; but since then I've thought it over and I've begun to understand it. He owns a great deal of real estate, and he's developed one of the *colonias*, as the separate suburbs are called. Well, I asked why he'd built all the houses with big front yards that everybody can see into, the way they're built at home, instead of building them with patios, which are so much more characteristic of Mexico

and give such a sense of privacy and are so cool and beautiful. And he said he'd noticed that people whose houses were built around patios looked *in* all the time, and that people whose houses had front yards looked *out* and that it did us all good to look out. You've looked out so much, Zoe, that it's made you understanding."

Zoe laughed, and said that her house in Alexandria did not have a front yard either, that its walled garden was almost as secluded as a patio; but before she could say any more, Bob came back, carrying her beautiful little new jacket, made of light natural lynx, over his arm, and said that Alfredo had been called upstairs, and had suggested that perhaps they had all better go there after all, for a few minutes at least, before they went to the Chinese Legation. So there was no more time for Helen to talk intimately to Zoe that evening, and the next day, as she had predicted, both visitors were engulfed in the wave of hospitality which different groups were eagerly waiting to lavish upon them. It was just as well, Bob told Zoe, that they had decided beforehand not to try to do any work, to call this a holiday; otherwise they would both have had heart failure, altitude or no altitude. But secretly he enjoyed his first appearance with her as a co-celebrity on the foreign scene. Though he had so sincerely and so repeatedly asserted that he never begrudged her the lion's share of the limelight, so long as he could pay the lion's share of the bills, he found it was astonishingly pleasing, after all, to be regarded as the logical head of "Capital Kaleidoscope," and to have his contribution to this considered on a par with his wife's. In like measure, he was relieved and delighted to find that Zoe had not only stood the hard journey with no apparent nervous strain, but that she was adapting herself, with surprising ease, to climatic conditions which he had been warned might be trying to her. Neither of them had experienced the slightest ill-effects from these; but whereas they acted as a stimulus to him, they acted as a sedative to her. He had never known her to sleep so well or to eat with such excellent appetite. After three days he scoffed at the siesta for himself, and went out to the Churubusco Country Club to play golf and have a swim with various male journalists who had quickly revealed themselves as kindred spirits; but Zoe was always asleep before he left her, and often still asleep when he came back. She woke refreshed, ready for whatever festivity the evening offered; then she sank again into deep dreamless slumber, from which Bob declined to rouse her no matter how many times he sent their *café con leche* back to the picturesque kitchen or how late they might be for their first morning engagement.

Besides the intervals devoted to golf with his fellow-journalists, Bob found himself spending considerable time, without Zoe, in the company of Guy Grenville, who promptly arranged a stag luncheon

in his honour, with the flimsy excuse that, as a bachelor, he was inadequate as a host to a lady of Zoe's calibre. Alfredo was invited, and went, to the luncheon also, as a matter of course, and there was no preliminary discussion of it indicating that it was regarded as significant or unusual in any way. But during the idle hour after their departure, before Helen and Zoe were summoned upstairs for *comida*, Helen spoke to her sister-in-law with the first signs of actual distress that she had betrayed since the visit began.

"I never see Guy any more at all, Zoe. He's stopped coming here to call entirely. And when we meet by chance, the way we did at the Chinese Legation the other night, he acts as if he hardly knew me. You must have noticed."

"Yes, I noticed. Well, don't worry about it, Helen, any more than you can help. Unless you want to make an issue out of it."

"How *can* I make an issue out of it?"

"It might be rather difficult. But I suppose there'll have to be a showdown, someday, between you and the old lady. If you want it to come sooner rather than later I should think you had your chance."

"But I don't want to have a showdown with her. I never could bear to quarrel with anyone, you know that. And it would hurt Alfredo's feelings terribly if I quarrelled with his mother. He's done everything he could to make me happy, you must realize that. He loves me with all his heart."

"Oh yes, I realize that."

"And, of course, he loves his mother, too. That's natural. Don't you—doesn't it seem to you sometimes as if Bob were standing up for our mother, Zoe, against you?"

"He does stand up for her. And it is natural. I wouldn't respect him if he didn't. But not against me exactly. I must hand it to Bob, he makes me feel I come first, in everything, and always has. The two cases aren't quite the same, anyway. I'm a devil when I get going, and I couldn't blame him much if he did turn on me, whereas you're an angel always. And Mrs. Morton isn't a fiend. She's just a rather pompous, rather vain, rather domineering old busybody, with a good deal of executive ability that can't be overlooked, and no conscious desire to hurt anyone. This woman upstairs is entirely different, unless I'm terribly mistaken; she's probably grown increasingly cruel ever since she was a child, beginning by tearing the wings off flies and stringing her pet puppy up by the paws. If she'd lived a little earlier, under a slightly different social system, she'd have ordered peons tortured and watched them writhe, without batting an eye. It's her kind that's given her caste a bad name, that's done Mexico no end of harm. Now her husband's utterly different, and as far as I can see, all her children are, too. Certainly Alfredo is. But she's got it in for you, for some

reason. I don't like having you here with her. I wish you could get away from her for good and all. There isn't any prospect, is there, that Alfredo may get another foreign post pretty soon?"

"Ordinarily, of course there would be, if he wanted it—a good one, too, Washington again, or London. But now the Terrazas are completely at odds with the present Government; you know that? All the old Catholic families are. If Don Luiz weren't so powerful, in all sorts of ways, that it wouldn't pay to offend him past a certain point, I suppose Alfredo would have been forced out of the Service altogether before this. Look at the last two places he has been sent! Now I think he's really glad to be at home. He loves Mexico, he loves his family, he loves this house and this way of living. He thinks it's all perfect. I've got to help keep it perfect for him as long as I can, haven't I, Zoe?"

"Yes, I suppose you have. I agree with you he has it coming to him. I'm all for him. I never liked a man better in my life."

"Why, you like Bob better!"

"Oh, that's different. I have periods of not liking Bob at all. You know the difference between liking a man and being in love with him by this time, don't you, sweetness?"

"Yes. You are still in love with Bob, Zoe, aren't you? As much as you were at first? That is, if it's all right for me to ask."

"I'm a great deal more in love with him than I was at first. But I don't like him quite so much. And he hasn't caught on to any of that yet. So don't tell him. It's just one of those things that it's better to let a man find out for himself."

Zoe rose from her easy-chair, holding her cigarette between her fingers, and made a leisurely tour of the room, picking up various small objects and examining them casually. It was not an unusual thing for her to do, when she could achieve it without appearing either restless or curious. Nevertheless, Helen watched her a little anxiously.

"I won't tell him anything you don't want me to— Are you tired of sitting here, Zoe? We can go out in the garden if you'd rather. Or was there something special you wanted to see?"

"I'd never get tired of sitting in a beautiful room like this, though I'm perfectly willing to go out in the garden if you like. The only thing I especially wanted to see was the territory just outside the windows and doors. I thought it was just possible somebody might be crouching there. The coast seems to be clear, this time, anyway. But I think, maybe, when we're in the mood to talk confidentially, it would be just as well if we took a drive or something. I wouldn't put it past the old lady to set someone to spy on us."

"I wouldn't either. I've thought of it lots of times. But I've never dared say so. And how could we take a drive, or something, alone? You haven't any Mexican licence, and I haven't, either.

I've never driven a car since I've been here. Doña Amelia doesn't think women ought to drive."

"Well, you might make an issue out of that, instead of about Guy. Incidentally, do you care anything about him?"

"Yes, Zoe, I do. Not the way I care about Alfredo, of course. You know what you just said about the difference between loving and liking. But since I've been kept from seeing him, I think about him a lot. Ever so much more than I did before. And the more I think about him, the more I want to see him."

"Yes, of course, it would work out that way. Well, as I said, don't worry about it any more than you can help. We'll figure out something together, sweetness. I'll stand by."

All the rest of the week Helen was gratefully aware of Zoe's sympathy and support. Indeed, she told herself rather reproachfully, she had never supposed Zoe could reveal so much tenderness, as far as she herself was concerned, or so much tact in dealing with the Terraza family. Even Doña Amelia described her to visiting relatives as *distinguida*, after the usual *simpatica* had been dismissed as inadequate. Her acceptance of Mexican customs, including that of the siesta, her relish of Mexican food, her delight in Mexican art and architecture—all these raised her rapidly in the esteem of her hosts. She had picked up a little Spanish during her European junketing in the Zephyr, and she had painstakingly added to her slender store of knowledge in the few weeks that had elapsed between her decision to visit Mexico and her arrival there; now, conscious of her many inadequacies and mistakes, but unabashed by them, she did her best to talk to the non-English-speaking Mexicans whom she met in their own language. The Terrazas' countless relatives rejoiced in her resourcefulness as sincerely as they complimented her upon it.

It was, however, her decision to go to Midnight Mass at the parish church instead of to a party at the American Embassy on Christmas Eve which had, undoubtedly, made the deepest and most favourable impression upon Doña Amelia; and it was the consciousness of this that caused her to make a similar decision the Sunday after Christmas. Bob, who had fallen in with her suggestion without much objection the first time, was inclined to resent it the second. Guy Grenville had asked him to go to his place in Cuernavaca for the day; he had been to church once to please the old lady; and after all, he had not been out of Mexico City at all. If it had been something he and Zoe could have done by themselves, that would have been different. But the whole family along, what fun would they have? He did not see the sense in it.

"I wasn't thinking so much of having fun, Bob. I was thinking of helping Helen."

"Well, I want to help Helen, too; you know that. But I'm not so sure, if I could have a good talk with Grenville, that I might not do

more for her in the long run than in any other way. It's ridiculous that he shouldn't even be allowed to come to see her. Such nonsense ought to be stopped."

"It always seems like nonsense when we're not personally concerned. But you know as well as I do that Guy Grenville's in love with Helen. Alfredo and Doña Amelia know it, too. Subconsciously maybe. Still, they know it. Helen doesn't yet. But it might dawn on her someday, and then everything would be very awkward."

"It wouldn't either. Guy Grenville wouldn't ever compromise a married woman no matter how much he was in love with her. He isn't that sort. On the contrary, he'd do everything he could to shield her."

"I seem to have a faint recollection about some conversations in which you tried to tell me Helen wasn't 'that sort,' and I reminded you that human nature is apt to be pretty much the same when it comes to——"

"Oh, cut it out, will you, Zoe? You may know more about women than I do, but I know a lot more about men than you do. Guy and Giles, for instance, aren't cut out of the same piece of cloth."

"Suppose you do some cutting out yourself. All right, go on up to Cuernavaca with Guy if you're so set on it. I'll go to church with the family. Of course, you and I could have fun together, after church, if you were only going to be here. But since you're not——"

"What do you mean, we could have fun?"

"Why, nothing special. We used to have fun together whatever we did. Have you forgotten?"

"No, I haven't forgotten."

"I thought maybe we could again, that's all. We could go to Cuernavaca ourselves. It wouldn't be too late to start, after church. Or to Xochimilco, like all the other tourists. Or we could just lounge around in our room and make love to each other."

"What are you driving at, Zoe?"

"Nothing, I told you. Doesn't the idea of making love to me appeal to you any more? You were awfully abrupt when I suggested that we might try sleeping together again. It would have worked out all right. You've seen for yourself that I've slept like a log ever since we've been here. But when I said I could move into the day-bed if you disturbed me——"

"Well, good God, how was I to know you'd suddenly start sleeping like a log when you've hardly slept at all for years? I thought I *would* disturb you. And I hated to think that you'd have to climb out of one bed in the middle of the night and grope around and get into another. I thought it was a lot better to save you all that bother. I still think it was. Besides——"

"Besides what, Bob?"

"You know as well as I do. Let me alone."

"All right, I'll let you alone. But we don't have to quarrel about it, do we, Bob?"

"We'll quarrel if you don't stop talking nonsense."

They did not talk about anything more just then, and the next morning, early, Bob started for Cuernavaca. Zoe was not asleep this time when he left, but she pretended to be, and her pretence was effective enough to deceive him. For the first time since the beginning of their holiday they were out of tune with each other, and both were baffled and disappointed because the harmony which they had seemed on the point of successfully recapturing had again eluded them. Bob scarcely saw the superb scenery through which the road over the mountains wound its upward way; he hardly heard Guy talking to him, amiably and unexactly, about this and that; he kept thinking about Zoe, about his love for her and his need of her, which he felt bound to deny in its entirety, lest she should suffer.

Zoe was more conscious of her surroundings, because her faculties as a trained reporter could not suddenly cease to function. She saw that some kind of a strange stand, fantastically decorated with a man's portrait and a red and black flag, had been erected beneath the great stone cross in front of the church. She saw that the paralysed beggar who habitually crouched at the doorway asking for alms, in a whining singsong, was more importunate than she had ever seen him before. She saw that the crowd in the plaza was almost as great as the crowd inside the church, though that was immense also, and that both seemed to be swayed by suppressed excitement. But at first she attached no special importance to any of this, largely because she was too preoccupied with resentment against Bob because he would not let her fulfil the destiny which seemed to her manifest. She sat quietly between Helen and Maria Michaela, and the turmoil in her own mind diverted her temporarily from the currents that flowed around her. Then suddenly she knew that she was caught in them.

She was sufficiently familiar with the Ordinary of the Mass to follow it intelligently, in a general way, for she had wandered in and out of so many Catholic churches abroad that, half unconsciously, she had learned a good deal about their practices. Now she rose and knelt, courteously though mechanically, with the other worshippers. For some time she had noticed a sort of muffled sound, unconnected with the progress of the services, rising above the prayers and chants. As she became increasingly aware of it, she tried to locate and isolate it, and realized that it was outside the church, though very close to it, and that it was steadily swelling in volume. The same reportorial instinct which had caused her

to notice the unusual in her surroundings roused her to action. She leaned over and whispered to Helen.

"Let me by, sweetness. I've got to get out in the air for a moment. I suppose it's the incense or something. No, please don't move. And don't let any of the others come either. I'll be back in a minute. And meanwhile I'd much rather be alone."

She remembered to genuflect as she left the pew, thus making her departure seem more natural, and though Doña Amelia cast a brief questioning glance in her direction, the sight of Helen gently shaking her head reassured her mother-in-law. There was nothing unusual or conspicuous about either late arrivals or early departures in the church; they occurred all the time and no one regarded them as irreverent. Several other persons went down the aisle at the same time as Zoe; when they reached the rear of the nave, where the outside noise was more noticeable, their numbers increased, but not suddenly enough to attract the attention of the worshippers nearer the altar. It was not until she had reached the swinging leather door, which a man who looked like a labourer held open for her, that Zoe knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that a riot was going on.

It radiated from the improvised dais beneath the stone cross, where a brawny young man, clad in a red shirt, dark trousers and a jaunty cap, was gesticulating violently, while he shouted rather than spoke. Closely packed around him were fifty or more men, also wearing red shirts, who were echoing his shouts, duplicating his gestures and applauding his exclamations. Zoe could get no more than the drift of these vehement remarks; but the crowd rapidly gathering around the fringes of the red-shirted group obviously took them as insults of a blasphemous character. A counter-murmur arose, beginning with a mere growl of "Shut up!" and "Down with the wise monkey!" But when a second orator mounted the dais his voice was drowned out by catcalls. The newcomers began to jostle the red-shirts and to snatch off their caps, tossing these into the air. Inevitably, a random blow was struck here and there, and these increased in number and intensity. The scuffle spread. Before it had actually reached the proportions of an uproar a shot rang out, and a thin, quiet man, whom Zoe had seen carefully skirting the crowd as he crossed from the park to the sidewalk in front of the church, fell flat on his face before the dais. He was fatally wounded, but no one stopped to succour him. On the contrary, he was crushed and trampled in the onrush towards the church. Zoe, caught in the crowd that was surging forward, heard the crackle of shots on every side of her. The labourer who had opened the leather door for her ten minutes earlier sank at her feet now; the paralysed beggar who had asked her for alms crumpled forward, still whining, quivered, and lay motionless. Other men, badly battered and bathed in blood, kept on their feet,

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struggling and shouting. The red-shirts were firing indiscriminately now, both on the disorganized mob which had picked a quarrel with them and which was desperately seeking to retreat, and on the worshippers who had taken no part in the fray, but who were seeking escape from the shots already whistling through the sanctuary. The church-goers were coming out rapidly now. No one, apparently, had been able to warn them to leave by the rear, if there were no vault in which they could take refuge, though Zoe was fighting her way towards the façade in an effort to get back inside. She had almost reached the leather door when Alfredo came out of it, with Helen on one side of him and Maria Michaela on the other. Immediately behind them Zoe could see Don Luiz, Doña Amelia and Lupe. The others, mercifully, were still inside.

"Go back!" she shouted. "Go back where you came from! I'm coming to you. I'll tell you what's happened. I'll be with you in a minute!"

She saw Alfredo glance in her direction, with a look of recognition and understanding, she saw him smile and nod. He half turned, pushing Helen gently behind him towards his father and mother, who had already regained the shelter of the leather door. Then she saw him try to put Maria Michaela behind him also. Even in that dreadful moment she was conscious of the quietness and gentleness of this last act.

The next moment he and his sister were both lying on the pavement. The scarlet stain from Maria Michaela's white dress spread over Zoe as she knelt beside them. The girl was dead already. But Zoe heard Alfredo say "Elena—alma de mi alma!" twice before he died.

PART VII

CHAPTER XXIII

If anyone had asked Helen, she would have said, sincerely, that she cared more for Bob and Zoe than for anyone else in the world, that without them she would have died herself, as she wanted to die, when Alfredo was killed. But as a matter of sober fact, the first real peace and comfort that she found was not with them but with Veronique.

To be sure, this was not all due to Veronique herself. By the time Helen reached Hunter's Green the ghastly circumstances of her husband's murder and of its harrowing aftermath had ceased to dominate her tortured consciousness completely, as they had for so long. She was able at last to detach her sense of loss from her sense of horror, and, under any circumstances, this would have been a slow and painful process. But she was in no state to be analytical. She only knew that whereas her final days in Mexico had represented fiery torture and her first days in Washington dull anguish, the quiet countryside of Virginia first brought reprieve and later relief.

In the beginning she had not been able to believe that Alfredo was dead. When her mother-in-law brought her out of the church and forced her to look down at him, she had said stupidly, appealing to Zoe, "He isn't badly hurt, is he?" She would never forget the tenderness with which Zoe had told her that nothing would ever hurt him any more. Zoe had stood beside her, entirely unafraid, shielding her from the mob that still surged around the church and from the fierce accusing gaze of Doña Amelia, which seemed to carry with it the question, "Why did you let him put you behind him? Why did you not stand in front of him and save his life by giving up your own?" She did not know why she had not done so, why she had not guessed that his life was in danger when he had thrust her back into the church. She would so willingly have died to save him. And now he was dead, he and that beautiful young sister of his who should have become a nun, and she herself was unharmed, with nothing on earth to live for.

She had stayed beside Alfredo's body, and Zoe had stayed with her, until at last the fury of the mob had spent itself, and the police had come and there had been fresh confusion and a great many questions, none of which she could answer. All she knew was that she had gone to church, quietly, with her husband and his family, as she did every Sunday, and that Zoe had been lovely

about going with them, but that something had bothered Zoe—the incense she said it was—and she had left before the service was over. Then a strange, sudden tumult had arisen in the church, echoing a noise that seemed to come from outside, and there had been shouts about locking the doors and setting the building on fire, and shots had rung through the rafters. In the midst of this Alfredo had told her quietly that there was nothing to be afraid of, that he would take her and Maria Michaela out, and that Don Luiz and Doña Amelia and the others would follow, that they would go home and stay there the rest of the day and that by the end of it this slight disturbance would be over. Then just as they reached the leather door she had recognized Zoe's voice, calling out clearly through the confusion, and after that she had been told Alfredo was dead and had seen the spreading stain that was covering everything.

She was still sitting beside Alfredo, late that afternoon, and Zoe was still with her, when Doña Amelia came and spoke to her again in a way she could not disregard. They had all returned to the Casa Catalina, the living and the dead, she was not sure just how, and then strangers had come in and separated her from Alfredo for a time. Zoe had told her, still speaking very tenderly, that it was always necessary, after a death, for such strangers to come into a house, that only they knew how to give the best care to the dead. She felt that she could care for Alfredo better than anyone else, but because it was Zoe who told her otherwise she believed this was true. She let Zoe lead her away and bathe her face and hands and give her some water to drink. But she kept asking piteously to be allowed to go back to Alfredo, and finally Zoe took her. When she saw him again he was dressed with great formality and stiffness, as he had been the first time she met him, and she wished that this formality and this stiffness might somehow be softened, for now it did not suit him as it had when he was alive. He was lying on a beautiful bier, with candles at his head and feet, and beside it was another bier on which Maria Michaela was lying, all in white, as she had been before, only now the white was spotless and flowing. The candles rose amidst sprays of white lilies, but there were mounds of marigolds there too, and she remembered that Doña Amelia had told her these were the flowers of the dead. It was at this same moment that Doña Amelia spoke to her.

"Have you no respect for what has happened that you sit beside your dead husband dressed like that? Have you no thought for his soul that you do not get down on your knees and pray for its repose?"

"I'll help Helen to change her clothes, Doña Amelia. She's been too stunned to think about those so far. But of course she'll put on proper mourning. And presently she'll pray too. In her own way and in yours also. Just give her a little time."

Zoe did not speak rudely to Doña Amelia; there was nothing in her voice or manner to give offence; nevertheless there was a firmness and finality about them which was infinitely reassuring to Helen. It was quite true that she had not given a thought to her inappropriate coloured dress or to the requirement of public prayer; but now she let Zoe lead her away again and clothe her in crêpe, and put a cross around her neck and a rosary between her fingers. She saw herself in the glass and she did not recognize the sombre figure which it reflected as her own. In her bewilderment she questioned Zoe.

"Do you think it will do Alfredo any good to have me look like this?"

"No, darling. Except that it will be easier for you, in the long run, if you can manage to do what's expected of you these next few days. And Alfredo always wanted things to be as easy for you as they could be, didn't he?"

"Yes. Of course he did. I know you're right, Zoe. What should I do now?"

"I think you should go back beside the bier for a little while. But I hope after that you'll let me give you something soothing and nourishing to drink and put you to bed."

"Oh, Zoe, I couldn't go to bed tonight! I couldn't stay alone! I've never stayed alone since I've been married! I must stay with Alfredo!"

"You mustn't stay with Alfredo so long now that you couldn't stay with him at all tomorrow. You—— People collapse sometimes, Helen, when they've had a shock like this. You mustn't collapse. You mustn't let anyone have an excuse to keep you away from him at the last, when it will mean most to you to be with him. Of course you're coming to bed by and by. But of course you're not going to stay alone. Of course I'm going to stay with you."

"Zoe, I—I think it would make me feel better if I could see Bob. Why doesn't Bob come?"

"He went to Cuernavaca this morning, darling, don't you remember? We've tried to reach him by telephone, but we couldn't. He'll be here before long, though. He's sure to be."

It was, however, very late before Bob got there. Helen, lying rigidly in her big bed, heard Zoe get up quietly from the couch beside it and go out of the room, closing the door after her, when he came into the *apartamento*. Afterwards, she could not help overhearing part of what they said to each other, though she tried not to listen. She heard the misery in Bob's voice and the hardness in Zoe's.

"Zoe, I'll never get over this as long as I live. If I'd done what you asked me to, if I hadn't gone away——"

"Hush! This isn't any time to talk about what you'll get over or

what I asked you to do or anything else that concerns you and me. We'll have our hands full enough trying to help Helen through the next few days, and after that, taking her away from here."

No, without them she certainly would not have survived, with any sort of sanity, the ordeal that still lay ahead of her. She had never been brought close to death before, even in its most merciful and natural forms. Now, face to face with hideous murder and all that went with it, she found that every passing hour added to her anguish. When Alfredo was lost to her, why must horror be heaped upon grief? Why must there be all this pomp and circumstance of mourning, these endless empty prayers, this ceaseless stream of black-clad weeping visitors, the police, the press, the photographers, the investigators, the public demands for justice? What good did it do to send a solemn delegation of protest to the skulking President now? What good did it do to heap crime upon crime by lynching a young Communist out of revenge for the slaughter of church-goers? What good did it do to have twenty thousand persons assemble for the funeral, or to see Maria Michaela's fellow members of the Young Women's Catholic Action Association walk in a procession behind the casket that was covered with white and yellow flowers and the banners of the society to which she had belonged? Would no one leave her alone with her own dead at the last? Could no one understand that it was too late now to talk of the law, that no ceremony would bring Alfredo back to life, that the magnificence of his tomb would only serve to shut him away for her forever?

Zoe and Bob did understand, Zoe and Bob did stand by her and shield her. And when the grandiloquent funeral was over, and the elaborate tomb was sealed, and the end of all things had come, it was they who told her, still tenderly, but with added firmness now, that she must, after all, find a way to go on.

"What do you want to do, darling? We're not trying to hurry you, but you've got to begin to think."

"I can't think. I don't want to do anything."

"Then will you let us think for you? Will you let us say that it would be better for you to come home with us, and stay with us while you're deciding what you want to do next, than to stay where you are?"

"You may say it. But I don't know. I don't know how I can leave my own little home, where Alfredo and I were so happy?"

She saw them look at each other, not long, but meaningly. Then Zoe spoke to her more gently than ever before.

"But, darling, it isn't your own little home any longer. You understand, don't you? You did understand from the beginning. You wrote me yourself that the *apartamento* was always set aside for the eldest son, from the time he came of age. Faustino is the

eldest son now, remember. Of course he wants you to stay in it as long as you like, of course he'll show you every consideration. But sooner or later——"

She had forgotten that, she had not really understood. If she stayed then——

"If you stayed then, you'd live upstairs. You'd have a lovely suite of your own, the one Doña Amelia offered us, with the terrace overlooking the garden. You'd be lapped in luxury, you'd be treated with the respect and consideration due to Alfredo's widow. You'd always be one of the family——"

"*One of the family!* But I couldn't be! I never could, even when Alfredo was alive! I tried and tried for his sake and it was all useless! Now that he's dead——"

"Then hadn't you better come home, Helen, where you have a family of your own, a family that you could belong to, that thinks the world of you? There's—there's lots of room in the Alexandria house. Sometimes it seems pretty empty to Bob and me. We'd be thankful if it didn't. We haven't talked to you much about it, but when we bought it——"

She had forgotten that, too. She had forgotten that Bob and Zoe had also been bereft. Of course, losing a baby, especially a baby they had never known except as a hope, was not like losing a husband, dearly loved for years. And yet, looking at them through her tear-filled eyes, Helen realized for the first time how much the loss of their child had changed their lives. Neither of them had been the same since. They had known great grief themselves, and they had been silent about it, while they sympathized with her in hers. Whereas she had wept and wept. She had been very selfish. She must not be selfish any more——

"I didn't think of it that way. I didn't know you'd really be glad to have me. But if you would—— And if you could arrange to have me leave here—I mean, in such a way that I wouldn't have to talk about it with Doña Amelia. I know she expects me to go to the tomb every day, to have Masses said. I must do what's fitting, I mustn't offend her. And still——"

They were able to arrange everything with unbelievably little delay, and they really were glad to have her with them. They showed her this in a hundred ways. Her father and mother, who had not seen her for so long, were glad to have her back, too, and her friends—the girls with whom she had come out, the older women to whose houses she had gone most. Even Isabel, who—as Helen had long since learned—never really put herself out for anyone unless this was to her own advantage, made a show of kindness and concern. But everyone was preoccupied—Bob and Zoe with their news bureau, her parents with their duties on Capitol Hill, the former débutantes with the secretarial and commercial posi-

tions they had acquired if they had not married and acquired families instead, the erstwhile prodigal dowagers with the strain and effort involved by holding the remnants of their fallen fortunes together and putting up a brave front against the inroads of disaster. Mrs. Morton now made a great show of domesticity at the office, having avidly devoured the feature stories about better-advertised Congressional ladies who were also secretarial wives, and who always kept coffee pots plugged in and supplies of sandwiches on hand. She herself featured hot chocolate and tortillas, which until Helen's departure from the Casa Catalina she had delighted in saying were especially prepared at her daughter's historic Mexican home; and to make the Mexican touch seem more authentic, she served the refreshments on antique silver, set out on a lacquer tray, hung the walls of the inner office with brocade vestments, and scattered serapes over the floor. Although neither Bob nor Zoe had been as receptive as Mrs. Morton might have wished to the idea of publicizing this unique arrangement, Mr. Ruthven had eventually been persuaded to send a reporter and a photographer to the office, and the results had been widely circulated not only in Washington but in Arkansas and various other sections of the country. Mrs. Morton, who had entirely forgotten her original objections to the Mexican match, immediately after the arrangements for Helen's marriage settlement were satisfactorily concluded had become much attached to her new decorations and was loath to abandon them. She therefore said as little as possible about Helen's departure from the Casa Catalina; and she continued to concentrate her entertaining in the office rather than to undertake it in her hotel. She had finally been dislodged from the Majestic, and was now living, as Zoe had so long ago suggested, in a non-housekeeping suite at the Egyptian. There was no way of fitting Helen into this and neither of her parents attempted anything of the sort, which after all would have been superfluous, considering the amount of space available at the Alexandria house. But Helen missed the feeling of intimacy which a warmer welcome would have given her, and wished that her father would sometimes talk to her on subjects other than those which centred about money.

To be sure, everything he said to her about this was reassuring. The income from her marriage settlement, which was all derived from sound American investments, had, of course, been unaffected by Alfredo's death; and in addition to this, Alfredo had carried life insurance with Helen as the beneficiary, and there would eventually be a good deal more money coming to her, because Alfredo had possessed an independent fortune inherited from an unmarried uncle, and had left all of this to Helen. Senator Morton explained to her, while she was still in no mood for explanations, that the insurance money would be paid promptly, but that there would probably be delays and complications about the rest, as the settle-

ment of any estate was apt to take time, even when there were no international aspects. Mexican aspects, it seemed, were apt to be unusually complicating, because of the oil situation, and most of this money was invested in oil. Still, Senator Morton had reason to hope that the difficulties would be neither prolonged nor insurmountable. If Helen would just have patience—— Helen had a good deal of patience, but eventually she cut her father short, with an abruptness that was rare for her.

"I don't understand any of this very well, Father, but I'm sure it must be all right. If there's some way it could be done, I'd like to turn over the estate money to you. Then I wouldn't have to bother with it any more, and you could pay off all your debts. I'm sure I can get along all right on the rest—after all, there's an awful lot of it, isn't there? I think my idea's a pretty good one, don't you?"

Senator Morton did not dare to tell her just how good he really did think it was, and indeed, he suffered some twinges from accepting so much at his daughter's hands. But they were nothing compared to the pangs he had suffered because of his debt-ridden state, and he quieted his conscience by the self-reminder that Helen had spoken the truth when she said she had more than she could spend, anyway. Eventually he told her that he would observe her wishes. She was not to concern herself about money matters any more, he said, patting her hand. She was just to go ahead and get all the pleasure she could out of being in Washington.

Methodically, she tried to do this. But it was a different Washington from the one she had left, swifter paced, higher keyed, more tense, more truculent. It would have been hard enough to fit back into its pattern in any case, after the leisurely, luxurious life of lovely isolation which she had led for so long. Now that its pattern had changed so greatly, she did not even know how to start adapting herself to it. She was not blind to the beauty of the house which Bob and Zoe had bought; but, like the house she had left, it was an abiding place of sorrow. She could not make it seem less sad by sleeping in the little room that had been closed so long. That room, to Bob and Zoe, would never become a guest chamber; it would always remain the unused nursery of a child who had died. Nor was there any logical place for Helen in the midst of the turmoil with which they were surrounded. The incessant ringing of the telephone and the doorbell disturbed her, and she was appalled by the uproarious groups who came pounding on the old brass knocker and flocking into the spacious hallway, whence they overflowed in every direction. They played the radio night and day, clustering around the small bar, made out of an old-fashioned sideboard, the contents of which seemed inexhaustible. They sang ribald songs and banged on the piano and sat hour after hour talking shop in an atmosphere thick with cigarette smoke, explaining at length one

night why what they had predicted the night before had not come to pass, expatiating on what the President ought to do and speculating as to why he had appointed one man and not another to office. Helen had a feeling that Bob, who loved to have a crowd of cronies around him at all hours, enjoyed this sort of thing much more than Zoe did, that left to herself Zoe would have entertained in a more restrained and ordered manner. Helen thought Bob's crowd was terrible. She shrank away from the minor Government officials and the loud-mouthed journalists and the semi-inebriated hangers-on with more aversion than she had shrunk from the stiff and sombre members of Alfredo's family, from whom, after all, she had been able to escape except at dinner-time. Here there was no escape for her, and yet though she could not get away from this tumult, she could not become a part of it either. Her sickness of heart would have precluded her from taking any share in general festivities, even if her mourning had not. She had no intimates any more whom she could visit in a quiet way. She was lonelier than she had ever been in her life, far lonelier than when she had written to Zoe begging her to come to the Casa Catalina. She had actually begun to wonder whether it would not be better for her to go back there after all, to make one more effort towards assimilation in the surroundings where she had loved and lost so much, when the letter came from Ronnie, inviting her to Hunter's Green.

She considered it during the day, while she was alone, and the more she considered it, the more strongly she felt that she would like to go. But she thought she ought to speak to her parents and to Bob and Zoe about it first. She called up the Senate Office Building and asked for her father's office. After a lengthy delay, Mr. Baker, the clerk, put her through to her mother.

"Helen?" Mrs. Morton inquired. "Helen? Is anything the matter, my dear? Because if you're all right I think it would be better if you called me again a little later, or perhaps better still if I called you, at a moment convenient for me. I'm unusually pressed for time today. The mail on the proposed Neutrality Act has been enormous. More than two hundred letters have come in already this morning, and I don't know how many telegrams. Yes, your father is at a committee meeting just now, and six very important callers are waiting to see him as soon as he gets back, the Governor of Arkansas and the Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court among them. Besides, we're going to the White House this evening, and I ought to get away from the office early if I can—it's the second time we've been asked there this season, and we never dined with the Shaws once, during that entire administration. We just went to those receptions where they had ice-water in paper cups; I'm sure you'll remember them. I'll say this for the Conrads, they are hospitable, even if they do ask Communists and cranks to the same parties as nice conservative Congressmen. Well, my dear, my

other phone is ringing furiously, and Mr. Baker is standing here at my elbow, making signs that he must speak to me. I'm afraid it's very imperative."

Helen sighed softly as she said good-bye, wondering if the time would ever come when it would be convenient for her mother to speak with her, and hoping that she would have better luck with the news bureau. But she did not. Bob had gone down to the Department of Agriculture, Beverley told her, to see if he could get a statement of any kind out of the Secretary on the establishment of the Soil Conservation Service. And Mr. Herron, the editor of the *Tribunal*, had arrived unexpectedly from New York for a conference with Zoe. She had given strict orders that no one was to be put through to her, unless there were a real emergency. Beverley hesitated to put Helen's call in that class, and Helen could not bring herself to insist. She knew that Bob was making a desperate effort to get something that might seem like an exclusive interview for "Capital Kaleidoscope" out of the Secretary of Agriculture, less because he cared much, one way or another, about the Soil Conservation Service, than because he was doggedly determined to do something that would offset the startling success Zoe had scored with her story, "Carnage at Coyoacan." She had consulted Helen before sending this off, and the time she had lost, out of consideration for Helen's feelings, had precluded her from making a sensational newspaper hit with it. But the delay had been a blessing in disguise; she had never before penetrated to the pages of a national magazine of high literary standing and large circulation like the *Tribunal*. But she did so now, and her contribution had been the most widely discussed article of the month. The following month it had been reprinted, in abbreviated form, in the leading *Digest* of the country. The editors of the *Tribunal* and the *Digest* were now both hot on her trail for more material, and Zoe was constantly talking in terms of daring escapades and dizzy figures, while Bob became increasingly sullen and silent.

One of the reasons why Helen was not happy in the Alexandria house was because she was more and more conscious of the strain between her brother and her sister-in-law. It had not occurred to her that two careers in the same family would almost inevitably create such strain, unless there were some powerful balance wheel to preserve harmony, and that in this case the powerful balance wheel was lacking. She knew that Bob and Zoe loved each other, and yet she saw that they were striving against each other now, instead of with each other against the world as they had at first, and that this strife was increasing every day. She had tried, so far as she could without seeming inquisitive or accusing, to speak to Zoe about the situation, and Zoe had first laughed her questions off and finally answered them with scathing bitterness.

"Bob's a big bully, Helen. Didn't you ever find that out?"

"No, I never did. I never knew him to bully anyone. I've always thought he was the kindest man in the world, except Alfredo of course."

"Nonsense! You know he bullied me into marrying him. Then he laid down the law about everything connected with the marriage, too, from the very beginning."

"I thought you said he promised you he'd never interfere with your writing."

"He did promise that. And he's kept his promise. But he might just as well have interfered with it as to get all burned about it. At first he was proud of it. Now he's jealous of it. He wants to be the head of the bureau as well as the head of the family."

"But, Zoe, I heard you say that as long as you thought Bob was a lightweight you didn't care a rap about him, but that when you found he had a code and a will of his own you fell for him hard. Those were the very words you used."

"Sweetness, I hope you won't bring up out of the dead past all the words I've ever used. Some of them were pretty profane, you may remember."

"Yes, so they were. I'd forgotten. But you stopped swearing a long time ago, Zoe, and these special words weren't profane, they were only slangy. Besides, it wasn't the words themselves that mattered. It was their meaning. You were terribly in love with Bob when you were first married."

"I'm terribly in love with him still. I've told you that already. But it doesn't do me any good."

"It doesn't do you any good——"

"Listen, Helen, I don't know whether you can stand plain talk or not."

"Yes, I can. I want to know what the matter is. If you're in love with Bob and Bob's in love with you——"

"We're in love with each other but we don't always agree with each other. And when we don't, I'm the one that has to give way. We've disagreed about several small things and ironed them out somehow. But we've disagreed about one big thing that we've never ironed out. I don't believe we ever will now. And sooner or later it's going to cause an explosion. I don't know what will happen then."

"Is it—— Could you tell me what it is?"

"Yes, since you're bound to know. I've always wanted children and Bob never has. At first he said we mustn't have any because it would interfere with my writing. But somehow I succeeded in getting him to forget about that. Men sometimes are forgetful when they're first married." A wry little smile played around Zoe's mouth for a moment and faded away. "If it *had* interfered with my writing we'd have been saved all this wrangling as to whether I'm better at it than he is or he's better at it than I am," she went

on, "and if he'd been sensible instead of stubborn, he'd have seen that. Maybe it will dawn on him someday, too late to do any good. Well, anyhow, you know I had a hard time when my baby was born—not any worse, at that, than thousands of women have. But Bob pretends that it was. He uses it as an excuse."

"Oh, Zoe, I can't help believing you're unjust to Bob! He isn't making excuses! But he can't bear the thought of having you suffer. He can't bear the thought that he might lose you."

"I might believe that if he hadn't said from the beginning that he didn't want children, or if he'd ever said anything different since. But he did. And he hasn't."

"Couldn't you talk to him, Zoe, and make him understand how you feel?"

"No. I've tried. He just shuts me up. I suppose it's partly because we both work under such high pressure all the time that we never have a chance to really thrash things out, or follow a train of thought through to a calm conclusion, the way we might if we weren't so hard pressed. Once or twice I've thought I'd made a little headway—I did when we were visiting you, for instance. We were having our first holiday in a long while, we were getting closer together again—at least, it seemed that way to me. Then, the first time I asked Bob to stay with me, and made a point of it, he went to Cuernavaca."

"You've never reproached him for that, have you, Zoe? Because it would be cruel if you did, when he reproaches himself so bitterly."

"He reproaches himself for having left you. Not for having left me. No, I've never reproached him. And I've never approached him either. He can wait till hell freezes over before I ever will again!"

"But, Zoe, don't you—— Bob and you aren't completely estranged, are you?"

Again the wry little smile appeared at the corners of Zoe's mouth. "No, not completely. But we might as well be, as far as I'm concerned. I take it for granted that it's accidental you and Alfredo never had any children. He was such a consistent Catholic and you were so much in love——" Helen flushed and nodded, her eyes filling with tears, and Zoe went on, harshly, "Well, you better be thankful that's the way it was. You better be thankful your husband didn't 'reduce all the mysteries of love to a matter of mere mechanical cautiousness.' That's the way Sinclair Lewis wrote about it in 'Main Street.' I couldn't quote another line from that book to you, but I can quote that one, because it made such a horrible impression on me that I've never forgotten it. Though you'd think a horrible experience would wipe out a horrible impression, wouldn't you? And I've had the horrible experience."

"Oh, Zoe, I can't bear to have you talk about Bob this way! I

can't bear to have you feel about him this way! There was another reason he didn't want children at first. It was because he wanted you all to himself. I understand how he felt because I felt the same way about Alfredo. I'm glad I didn't happen to have any."

"Well, if this had just happened it would be different. Besides, how do you feel now? Aren't you sorry now that you haven't someone left who's a part of Alfredo too?"

"No, I'm glad. Because if I'd had a baby it would have been a Mexican baby, and Alfredo's family would have claimed it and me too. I don't want to be claimed. I adored being bound to Alfredo, but I couldn't have borne being bound to anybody else."

"Helen, you're the most surprising creature I ever knew. You never run true to form. There's no telling what you're going to say or do next. Now I should think it would be you, instead of Ronnie, who would be crazy to have half a dozen children—— Poor Ronnie! She certainly is having rough sledding."

"Don't we all have rough sledding sooner or later, Zoe? It's beginning to seem to me that no matter how happy a person's life looks, the more you learn about it the more tragedy you find in it. I've always thought, until lately, that you and Bob were terribly happy together. And now I've found out—— And I supposed, when I married Alfredo, that nothing on earth could ever make me unhappy again. But still——"

Helen's eyes, which had been dangerously full already, slowly overflowed. Zoe, feeling there was nothing she could say or do that would be reassuring at the moment, looked away and pretended not to see. At last she answered rather objectively.

"I'm afraid you've hit on some home truths, sweetness. But, after all, one of the reasons we all feel cheated is that we expect too much out of life. If we'd only face the fact that it isn't all beer and skittles, we wouldn't get so many knock-out blows. I'm sorry there were snakes in your paradise, and that you got driven out of it with a fiery sword, so to speak, when you weren't to blame for anything. But, as you say, you're not bound. That's something. And I'm not kicking so far as I'm concerned. You know I didn't start out to do that or to hurt your feelings about your brother. You know you insisted on hearing all this, and I've only told you the truth. It would serve Bob right if I did the same thing Isabel Windsor did. I might be more successful at it than she was."

Helen had never clearly understood before just what Isabel Windsor had done. But Zoe told her now, and told her, too, in such a way that there was an inescapable connotation between the statements—that she had definitely decided to go that summer to Lima, where Giles was now head of the American Naval Mission. The last remark she made hurt Helen more than anything else she had said.

"And don't start being too sorry for Bob, either. He has his

compensations. Look at the riffraff he brings to this house! I thought I was through with that sort and I was thankful for it. But he's reverting to type. He was keeping some pretty loose company when I first knew him and getting a good deal of fun out of it. I don't need to go into too many details. But have you forgotten the cigar-stand girl at the Majestic? I haven't. Or his original attitude towards Veronique either, for that matter."

"It's too dreadful. I can't listen to any more. Bob's never really loved anyone but you, Zoe, in his whole life. If he ever did anything that was—— Well, you know, it was before he married you. He's been absolutely faithful to you. I know he always will be."

"Well, I'm glad you feel so sure of it, for your sake. I don't. Suppose we talk about something else for a change."

They had done so, and Helen could see that Zoe had made a special effort, afterwards, to treat her with even greater fondness than ever before, if such a thing were possible. Zoe had been very pleasant to Bob also, saying nothing that was stinging or sharp, dropping all discussion of her South American project, deferring to his wishes in all sorts of small thoughtful ways that made for surface harmony, and Bob had responded expansively to this treatment. But now as she turned from the telephone, after talking with Beverley, Helen had a desperate feeling that Bob would fail to get his exclusive interview with the Secretary of Agriculture, and that Zoe, on the other hand, would get her big assignment. Then the bickering would begin all over again, the mutual recriminations, the hard hostile feelings. Bob would be sullen and Zoe would be vituperative. Helen felt that she could not bear to be with either one or the other when they were in such moods.

She took Veronique's letter out of the envelope and reread it slowly. Then she went to the window, still holding the letter in her hand, and looked out. It was a beautiful day, and the early spring flowers had burst into sudden bloom. Crocuses were coming up through the lawn and there was a fringe of forsythia around it. They made her think, with irresistible longing, of the crocuses and the forsythia at Hunter's Green. She put the letter back in its envelope, laid it down on her desk, and took her wraps from the wardrobe.

She was still wearing a close-fitting crêpe bonnet and a long black veil, and she was aware of their weight as she went out into the sunshine, picking her way cautiously over the uneven pavements in which, apparently, Alexandrians actually took pride, since nothing was ever done about improving them. It really did not matter much about the pavements, Helen thought, as she passed Christ Church, which rose in simple dignity above the feathery trees and great tombstones that surrounded it. She turned down a street lined on either side with historic houses, some of them pre-

tentious and all of them picturesque, and the feeling grew that a city which had kept its individuality and its charm intact, as this one had, against all ugly inroads of so-called progress, had a right to its idiosyncrasy regarding bad pavements. She turned a second time and paused in front of the display window of a motor agency, looking thoughtfully for a moment at the gleaming models arrayed there. Then she opened the door and went in. An agreeable young salesman came forward.

"Good-morning. Is there something I can show you?"

"I thought I'd like to buy a car."

"We have a very complete line in now. What style did you have in mind?"

"I hadn't thought. Except that I'd like a blue car."

The young salesman suppressed a slight cough.

"If you're planning to drive it yourself, perhaps you'd be interested in our new two-door sedan. It's good-looking and it's very reasonably priced."

"It's nice of you to think about that part. But I've got plenty of money. That is, I haven't a great deal with me, not more than two or three hundred dollars, but I've got plenty in the bank. I know that's closed now, for the day. But it would be all right if I didn't pay for the car until tomorrow, wouldn't it?"

The salesman swallowed hard, but unobtrusively. "Oh yes, that would be quite all right. If you'll show me which car you like best, Mrs——"

"Mrs. Terraza."

"—Mrs. Terraza, we might take a spin down the Memorial Boulevard to Mount Vernon."

"I'd like to go very much. But I'm afraid you'll have to do all the driving. I haven't had my hands on a wheel for over five years. It wouldn't take long to learn again though, would it? Or to get a licence?"

"We'd be very pleased to help you with all that, of course, Mrs. Terraza. And about the registration and the insurance, too. Now if you'll just get in——"

That same evening Helen wrote to Veronique that she had bought a car, and that she would drive down to Hunter's Green in it as soon as she had a licence and could find something to wear on her head that would not keep blowing in her face all the time. She had told Zoe and Bob about her plans and they approved, but they were not coming with her because they were so terribly busy just then. So she was coming alone. She would rather come that way, anyhow.

Ronnie and Welby and Bennie were all out on the terrace watching for her when she came up the driveway at Hunter's Green. She waved and called to them and they waved and called back. Then

Bennie came bounding forward, surrounded by small tumbling puppies, whose gait was a good deal like his own, and Welby set his wheel-chair in motion with such skill and swiftness that his progress was almost as rapid as his son's. Veronique walked beside the wheel-chair with her hand over the top of it, and Helen saw, instantly, that she had changed a great deal. She looked older than she was, and very tired, and shabbier than Helen could ever remember seeing anyone with whom she was on visiting terms—there was something about this shabbiness not unlike that of some very poor and very respectable women whom she had known in Mexico. When Ronnie took hold of her hands she could feel that Ronnie's own hands were rough, and presently, when they all sat down together she saw that Ronnie's fingernails were very closely clipped and that two of them were broken. All the same, Ronnie was beautiful—her big dark eyes, which had lost some of their sparkle, but which were gentler than they used to be, and her colour, which was not as bright as it had been, but much softer, and her masses of black hair, which were gathered up into a knot at the nape of her neck, and her rounded feminine figure, which was a little fuller than when she was a girl. Her boisterous child was beautiful, too. He looked very much as she must have looked when she was a child herself, Helen decided, or even as she had looked when Helen first knew her, before she had been so poor and worked so hard. As for Welby, though he had also changed a great deal, this change had all been for the better, as far as Helen could see. The slight coarseness and lack of keenness which had characterized his face when he was younger were gone now. Its lines were clean-cut; its expression had intelligence and refinement. His person and clothing were both immaculate. Helen's eyes strayed to his hands and saw that they were very finely shaped, long-fingered and sensitive, with blue veins branching delicately under the white translucent skin. She had always been deeply aware of the significance of hands. She had noticed Alfredo's when she fell in love with him before she even knew his name.

Ronnie and Welby both made her feel that they were very glad to see her, just as everyone in and around Washington had done, but here her welcome was unhurried and uncomplicated. They continued to sit on the terrace, as if there were nothing else in the world to do, and talked with the same ease and the same friendliness they would have shown if they had parted from her only the day before. Bennie, after racing and roaring for some time with his pets, climbed up into her lap, dragging a couple of puppies after him, and imperiously suggested that she should read aloud to him; afterwards he settled down and fell fast asleep. Twilight descended gradually, and still none of them had moved. They did not do so until Susie—whose dark form they could just discern as she moved about indoors, turning on the lights—came out to say

that she had unpacked Mrs. Terraza's bags, that supper would be ready whenever they wanted it, and would they have drinks or cocktails? Helen had forgotten that in the hunt country a cocktail was never classed as a real drink, and when she remembered she was amused. It was a long time since anything had amused her.

When she went up to her room to bathe and change for supper she found that Susie had done much more than unpack, to give her a sense of being at home. The fire was burning and the vases were full of flowers and her dressing-gown and slippers laid out for her. The firelight flickered rosily on the white woodwork and the white draperies of the bed, but the windows were open to the soft spring air, and the chirping of crickets and croaking of frogs came up from the fields and swamps. She stopped to listen to them, and while she was listening Ronnie came quietly into the room and asked if there were anything she needed, if there were anything else she would like——

"You don't need to come to supper, you know, sweetness, if you don't feel like it. Grandma almost never does—that's why you haven't seen her yet. Very often Bob and Zoe don't when they're here, either. At least, they very often didn't, when they were first married. How are they? I've missed them since Congress opened and they've had to stop spending week-ends here."

"They're pretty well. I'm not happy about them though, Ronnie."

"They're not happy about themselves. I hoped you wouldn't find it out before I could get you away from there. But Welby and I are happy about ourselves and I'm sure you'll have a different feeling here. Are you positive you don't want Susie to bring up a tray? I don't want you to do anything you don't feel like doing."

"But I do feel like coming down. I want to be with you and Welby and Bennie."

"Well, I've put Bennie to bed now. You can come and see him in his crib if you want to—he asked what had become of the pretty lady. He's taken to you instantly, Helen, I can see that. But after you've said good-night to him, I think you'll like a quiet evening. It's always pretty tempestuous when he's around. Welby's waiting downstairs for us with the drinks. I think Dabney's dropped in for dinner, too. You remember Dabney Turberville, don't you?"

Helen did remember Dabney Turberville. She had always liked him very much, and now, when she saw him, she instantly thought of the time she had mentioned him to Zoe, saying she did not understand why Guy should not come to see her, at the Casa Catalina, casually and constantly, as Dabney went to Hunter's Green. While they were sitting around the fire, having their drinks, Dabney mentioned Guy himself, in the easy offhand way he had of talking about everything.

"I hope our mutual friend Grenville can get here for the hunting

next fall, Helen. I've suggested he should save up his leave for it. He hasn't had any for a long time."

"I hope he can. It would be fine for him if he could. I think he's very conscientious; he works very hard."

She could not imagine why she should blush while she was saying anything so commonplace. But evidently, in the soft light, no one noticed the unwelcome colour come into her face; at least, no one gave any sign that this had been the case. For a moment she feared that Dabney might ask her whether she had seen a great deal of Guy in Mexico, and that when she said no, as she would have to do, he would ask questions which would be awkward for her to answer. But Dabney did not ask any questions. He sat, as usual, holding the one drink which he hardly touched, and talked about the prospects for the Warrenton Gold Cup, in which he had several entries, and the Upperville Pony Show, in which Bennie was to ride for the first time that spring. While he and Welby were discussing these events two more men came in, who seemed indefinitely expected, and whose arrival caused no stir of any kind. Helen recognized them as two old beaux of Candace Hunter's, Jett Dabney and Stewart Bainbridge. They paid her ponderous compliments, standing with their backs to the fire and their drinks in their hands, and then began conversationally telling Welby and Dabney what was wrong with the hunt country and the world at large. Their remarks were received amiably but not over-seriously, and presently Veronique said that Father Flynn had hoped to get there for supper, too, but she was afraid he must have been detained, and if everyone was getting hungry, perhaps they had better go in without him. No one was unduly hungry at the moment, so they all sat around the fire for another half-hour, and Jett Dabney and Stewart Bainbridge had two more drinks apiece. Finally, when they had decided that perhaps it would be best to go into the dining-room after all, Father Flynn appeared, looking very brisk and merry, and saying he was sorry he was late, but that evidently sin was rampant in the county, for he had listened to an unusually large number of confessions. Then he asked a brief and cheerful blessing, and they all sat down at the table.

Helen could not help watching Veronique thoughtfully as the meal progressed. She was not deceived by the atmosphere of untroubled leisure and prodigal hospitality which Ronnie managed to maintain. She knew that her hostess must have risen very early in the morning and worked very hard all day to have her appointed tasks behind her at nightfall. Bob and Zoe had talked to her about the partnership which had been evolved, and Helen understood that while this was now a going concern, more than breaking even, only Ronnie's efforts had made it so and kept it so. The news bureau necessarily absorbed most of the young journalists' time and strength; the stock farm was only a side issue for them, one

which gave them a logical excuse for getting into the country and indulging in exercise and recreation which they both needed, and in which Zoe, especially, revelled, but which was, after all, of minor consequence compared to their major occupation. To Veronique, on the other hand, the stock farm was of vital importance. The apple orchards had still failed to make their long-expected comeback as a source of solid profit, though a small revenue was now coming in from the apple candy, apple jelly and apple butter with which Ronnie was experimenting; the income she had counted on receiving when she reached her majority was not a fourth as large as she had expected it to be; and the maintenance of the vast estate she had on her hands was a constant drain on her resources. Bob had insisted on sharing his movie money with her equally, but twenty-five hundred dollars had not gone very far, spread out over taxes, repairs and wages. The publicity the movie had given Hunter's Green had, to be sure, been helpful, though it had roused much local criticism, because of the scene depicting an imaginary fox hunt as taking place in midsummer, with the trees in full leaf and the corn standing in stacks. But tourists had been attracted because of it, and were duly escorted through Hunter's Green to see its treasures, or entertained for a meal or a week-end at a price that would have seemed fantastic if it had not been so freely forthcoming. All this would not have kept the place unmortgaged and conditioned for progress, however; Ronnie counted on the stock farm to do that, and she had not counted in vain; but every step of the way to success had been rough going. Increasingly, each year. Welby was able to help her with management and direction, and Welby loved and understood livestock, and the conditions and countryside which produced these to best advantage; but he could take no active part in the stock farm's development. Veronique had been obliged, first to get over hating the hunt country and all its products, then to learn to like them, and finally to achieve comprehension of them. None of this had come swiftly or naturally, and she was still forced to put into her task twice the time and trouble that a woman reared to it and at ease with it would have given it. The fact that she had never faltered and that she was now past the point where she could fail gave Helen a consciousness of courage and purpose that was uplifting to her.

But if Veronique's tangible success was an inspiration, it seemed to Helen that her intangible success was nothing short of a challenge. Helen had neither the disposition nor the experience to incline her towards analysis; but looking around the table at the men who were forgathered there, Helen could sense the dependence of each on the one woman to whom they all turned. What Ronnie's steadfastness had meant to her husband was written plain for all the world to see; crippled though he was, he could, and did, give her the tribute of such adoration as mortal woman almost

never earned or received. His sublimated face, so drained of the dross which had once disfigured it, was testimony enough of what she had done for him and with him. Helen did not study Welby for long; indeed, there was something about his gaze, when he was looking at Veronique, that was blinding to Helen; she turned away, with torn heart strings, to look at the others. The priest was not hard to understand either. In a region predominantly Protestant there were not many houses like Hunter's Green open to a man of his cloth; indubitably, Veronique must have saved him from indescribable loneliness of mind and spirit, while his share in the resurgence of her faith must have given him fresh courage to reveal salvation to other groping souls. The elderly and impoverished sportsmen, whose dashing days were now so far behind them, were not incomprehensible either; they had ceased to be sought out by the gay young set, and the fashionable newcomers had always ignored them; they could not ask or expect anything much better out of life than the warmth and welcome which Veronique gave them so abundantly and for which they could give nothing in return except gratitude and loyalty. But the fifth guest was different. For seven years now he had been Veronique's constant companion; and Dabney Turberville was not a cripple or a celibate or a derelict; he was a virile and engaging man, wealthy, cultivated and delightful. In spite of her persistent lack of sophistication, Helen could not help wondering how Veronique could see him, day after day, without being conscious of all this, to a devastating degree. She wondered, too, how he could see her, in her dimmed, but developed, glory, without coveting his neighbour's wife. Was he serving his time, as Jacob had served time for Rachel, but with no prospect of reward? It seemed certain now that Welby might live to be an old man, just as it seemed certain that he would never recover; it was inconceivable that Veronique would deliberately plan to deceive him. Then why did she not have the wisdom to deny herself both the solace and the stimulus which she must derive from the presence of Dabney Turberville? For the first time, a small insidious doubt regarding her own former course of reasoning began to creep into Helen's mind. Had it perhaps been just as well, after all, that she had not seen more of Guy Grenville? Alfredo had been her one and only love. And yet—and yet—in his absence, while she felt herself the prey of Doña Amelia, might not the solace and stimulus which she herself might have received from another man have been dangerous to her, just as she was now beginning to believe Dabney's might be dangerous to Ronnie?

She tried to dismiss these questions from her mind, which at first had been so tranquil at Hunter's Green, and which now had become so futilely agitated. No one else at the table, it was clear, shared her lack of quietude. The evening meal progressed peacefully, at an unhurried pace, and after it was over they all went back

into the drawing-room. Father Flynn was the first to leave, as he had been the last to arrive; he had six o'clock Mass to say, he reminded them jovially, whereas all the rest of them could stop in bed till noon, if they chose. Nothing of the sort, Ronnie retorted; Bennie was the best little alarm clock in the world; he and she would both be in the saddle before Father Flynn got to his church; he had better say a prayer for her, because if she could get to Mass once a week, without having something go amiss during her absence, she was doing very well— He went out smilingly, but unobtrusively, without interrupting the bridge game in which the other four men were absorbed. When he left, something strengthening went out of the room, and Helen suddenly felt very tired, and wondered if she could recapture her sense of restfulness in her solitary firelit chamber. She excused herself, too, and Ronnie, who was making a sweater suit for Bennie, laid down her knitting, and went upstairs with her guest to see that all was well with her for the night. Then she kissed her warmly and left her.

Helen undressed quickly, prayed briefly, and fell asleep almost instantly. She woke with the same suddenness, and with no idea as to how long she had slept. The windows were open, and the room was flooded with moonlight. The fire had died down, taking its warmth with it, and now there was a slight coolness in the air. For a few moments she lay still, breathing in the refreshment that this brought with it. Finally, feeling a little chill, she reached for her dressing gown, and walked over to the west window, from which the breeze was blowing, intending to shut it out. Then she drew back, startled, into the shadow of the shutter, stifling a small cry.

The moonlight covered the grass like a glaze, and the surrounding trees were quivering like quicksilver. The supernal brightness was all-embracing. In it were revealed two figures, motionless as marble, standing facing each other in the centre of the shining lawn.

CHAPTER XXIV

HELEN did not dare to stir. No matter how quietly she moved, a creaking board or a swinging shutter might betray her. She stood perfectly still, shivering with apprehension now as well as cold. There was no doubt in her mind as to the identity of the figures. There could be only one explanation of their presence in such a place, at such an hour.

While she continued to stand trembling in the shadows, the figures on the lawn began to move slowly and separately across it. When she first saw them, they had been as silent as they were still, but now she could hear the murmur of their voices, which became more and more vague and fitful the further away they went. She was thankful that she could not hear their words, that she was not guilty of involuntary eavesdropping as well as involuntary spying. At last, determined that she would not look, even if she could not leave, she shut her eyes. When she opened them again the figures had disappeared.

She crept back into bed, still shivering and terrified by strange sounds. Above the chirping of the crickets and the croaking of the frogs, she was conscious of a thudding noise, such as the hooves of a galloping horse might make, and she instantly thought of the ghostly hunter, whose boots could be heard falling on the floor, after his heavy tread had ceased to resound on the stairs. She listened breathlessly, expecting that she would hear these, too. But silence had fallen again. The hoofbeats had died away in the distance. Even the crickets and the frogs were mute at last. Finally the realization came to her that there was nothing mysterious about the night, except what she had made of it in her own mind, that indeed the apparition which had disturbed her most was one of tragic reality, and that the reason she was still so cold was because she had not shut the window after all, having entirely forgotten her purpose in going to it, because of the shock she had received. She rose again and went again to the window. This time, when she looked out of it, she saw Ronnie coming across the lawn towards the house alone.

Helen watched her with reluctant fascination. Ronnie had always walked well, with a swinging step that seemed to spurn fatigue, and her shoulders and her head both flung back, giving an effect of freedom from any kind of burden. But Helen had never seen her move with so much majesty and so much meaning. Her hair was loosened from the knot into which it had been gathered during the day, and fell in a dark cloud over her shoulders. The shabby dress she had on, like everything else about her, was transfigured by the

moonlight; it was shining and silvery now, and its flowing sleeves and deep-cut bodice fell away from skin that was more shining and silvery still. She had broken off a branch of flowering redbud, and carried it in her hand. Softly, she was singing. She was no longer merely a figure of dauntlessness, though freedom and fearlessness still appeared to stream from her. She was also a figure of transcendent beauty.

Suddenly Helen was aware that Ronnie had seen her. There had not been time for her to retreat before Ronnie's gaze, which knew no more limits than her movements, had been raised to the window, where Helen's own figure was clearly silhouetted against the shutters. Ronnie lifted her arms, waving her branches of flowers, and called out gaily:

"Are you sleep-walking, sweetness? Or couldn't you sleep? Never mind, don't try to make me hear from there. I'll be right up."

She quickened her pace, calling out a second time. She would just go to Welby's room first and make sure that he was all right, that he did not need anything. Then she would be right along. The interval before Ronnie arrived was more protracted than Helen had expected, but she was thankful for the respite. What should she say to Ronnie? What *could* she say? Her distress deepened with every passing moment; by the time Ronnie knocked at her door she was almost beside herself.

Ronnie came into the room calmly. The delay was partially explained by the fact that she had taken time to undress, and to heat some milk. She had only a negligée on now, over a plain nightdress, and soft heelless slippers, and she was carrying an old-fashioned French *veilleuse* made of exquisite flowered porcelain in her hand. She set it down on Helen's bedside table and talked to her about it before she said anything else.

"I've fixed up a posset, sweetness," she said kindly. "I think posset is an awfully cute word, don't you? And it's a cute combination, too—milk and spice and wine. This will stay warm for a long while—see the little lamp underneath the covered cup? That keeps the milk hot and at the same time makes a friendly little light in a room. I like a friendly little light in a dark room, don't you? I think I'd have a vigil lamp in mine, if it weren't for fear of disturbing Welby. He likes the darkness better. He says that it is friendly. I suppose it gives him the feeling that no one can see him. But you must have seen lots of vigil lamps in Mexico."

Helen, accepting the posset mechanically, said briefly, in a shaking voice, that she had.

"Why, sweetness, your fingers are just as cold as ice! Climb back there under the covers! I'm going to get you a hot-water bottle. Unless you'd let me get into bed with you instead. I know I could warm you up. Does it bother you to have somebody in bed with you?"

Helen, her voice still shaking, said that it did not. Ronnie took off her dressing-gown and got into the big bed, lying down on her back with her arms underneath her head and her hands clasped behind it, very close to Helen. The dim light from the little *veilleuse* flickered over her dark hair and her glowing face and her white neck. She went on talking, easily and companionably.

"I'm terribly sorry you were disturbed. The bridge game went on and on. Welby enjoys bridge so much that I hated to break it up. Then Jett and Stewart each wanted a nightcap. The terribly old rattlertrap they drive around in together always makes a horrible racket when they're getting it started. I told them to be as quiet as they could, but they made enough noise to wake the dead. Was that what disturbed you?"

"No. I must have been asleep when they left. I went to sleep right away. But I woke again. I was a little chilly, and so I got up to close the west window. I thought the wind was coming from that direction."

"And when you got up, you saw me coming across the lawn, and thought I was a ghost? No wonder you're trembling!"

"No, I didn't think you were a ghost. I knew who you were. But just before that I did hear something uncanny. I heard horses' hooves, and I thought about the hunter, the one who drops his boots, you know—"

Ronnie laughed comfortably. "Why, I ought to have told you! Dabney always comes over on horseback. Those were real hoof-beats you heard—Gallant Lady's. Gallant Lady is Dabney's favourite mare. She has her own stall over here, in the brood mares' stable—we've never been able to afford to have that full, the way it ought to be, worse luck! He puts her in there when he gets here, and my boys bed her down; then when he's ready to go home he gets her out himself. He has his own key to the stable. Only tonight he forgot it. He stood out on the lawn feeling for it in all his pockets until I went out to see what on earth had happened. Welby and I were still on the terrace—we'd gone out there for a last breath of air before we went up to bed. So we saw him. Of course, then I had to get my own keys, and go out to the stables with Dabney. But I didn't mind, it was such a beautiful night. In fact, it was so beautiful we just stood and stared at it for a few minutes. We couldn't help it. I don't think I've got as much feeling for beauty as Zoe has, but once in a while it gets me, too. It did tonight. I'm glad it did, because otherwise I might have been irritated with Dabney for doing such a stupid thing as to forget his key. He does do some stupid things. But he does so many nice ones, too, that usually it's easy enough to overlook the others, even without moonlight to help."

Involuntarily, Helen drew a deep breath. She stifled it as quickly as she could. But Ronnie heard it.

"Why, sweetness! Why, Helen! You didn't by any chance go to the window more than once, did you? You didn't forget to put it down the first time because you were upset?"

"Oh Ronnie, please forgive me! I really was cold. I really did mean to put it down. It never occurred to me——"

"Why, of course you meant to put it down! You don't suppose I doubt that, do you? And what on earth is there to forgive?"

"I thought—I really did think——"

"Well, sweetness, lots of other people think the same thing. I didn't suppose you would. It doesn't seem like you, somehow. But after all, it doesn't matter. It doesn't do me any harm because it isn't true. Haven't you ever noticed, honey, that if you have reason to feel guilty, even the least little bit, you're terribly annoyed or hurt or indignant, according to your make-up, when people think the worst of you? But if you're at peace with your own conscience, then it doesn't matter what they think."

Ronnie unclasped her hands, and put one of her arms under Helen, flinging the other out wide. The gesture disarranged the bedclothes, and Helen could see Ronnie's lightly veiled breast now, as well as her white neck and her glowing face and her dark hair. It was full and firm under its laces, and Helen thought that anyone—a bereft woman, or an ailing child or an injured man—might lay a weary head down on it and find infinite comfort and healing there. She moved her own head over and laid it on Ronnie's breast, and Ronnie drew her closer and went on talking to her.

"You've been a widow now for four months," she said, "so you've had time to find out that besides all the grief and bereavement that people talk about to you and sympathize with you for, there's a lot of loneliness and longing they don't mention, either because they're afraid to or because they don't understand what it's like. I'm not afraid to and I do understand what it's like. I've been a widow, in the sense we're speaking of now, for seven years. There isn't anything I don't know about what it does to you. I see why women marry a second time, when they're still in love with the memory of their first husbands, and I see why they absorb their children's lives, and I see why they go all to pieces, physically and mentally and morally. I think in one way I've suffered more than most women do, because I've had to live all these years with the consciousness that what might have been a normal engagement and a joyous honeymoon were both ruined because I'd been such a fool. You don't ever feel like a man's betrothed, or his bride either, if you start out the way I did. And Welby tried so hard to make up to me for what had happened! He was so sorry—and so sweet! He didn't do what lots of men would have done—most men, I reckon, in his place—remind me all the time of how cheap he'd got me, or act as if he thought he had a right to treat me roughly. He tried to make me forget. He tried to be especially tender, to surround me

with loving-kindness all the time. And I wouldn't let him. I kept fighting him. I told him I hated him, which was a lie, because I loved him by then. I told him I loathed having the baby, which was another lie, because I always wanted a baby. I made him so desperate that he wanted to die. He can go on telling me till doomsday that he was injured accidentally, and Doctor Foster can, too. But I know in my own soul that isn't true. I know he tried to kill himself because I was so cruel to him, I know I ruined his life. My share of the penalty is that I can't have him again, or another child, which would be bad enough, for most women who love their husbands and want children. But what do you suppose it's like for a woman who keeps thinking *why* she can't, who knows it's her own fault? How do you suppose any of the ordinary rules can hold with her?"

"Ronnie darling——"

"Don't say you can't bear to hear me talk like this, that you can't listen. I suppose that's what you said when Zoe talked to you about her petty little troubles. But this time you've got to listen. I know exactly what I've done, I've got to live and die with the knowledge that nothing can undo it or remedy it. Do you suppose it would help, when I've got to stagger along under that knowledge, to have a lover? A miserable makeshift for what I really want? A secret, dirty, deceptive affair? Why, it would make me so much more wretched than I am already that I couldn't stand it! I'd break down completely."

"Ronnie, you do make me see that now. I don't see how I could ever have thought anything else—about you. But——"

"But you still don't get Dabney's side? Well, you will in a minute, because I'm going to tell you that, too. You see, Dabney's known how I felt, from the beginning. I never explained it to him. No one had to explain it to him. He just knew. And he thought I'd need someone to stand by. Someone besides a child and a priest. Someone about whom I could say to myself, 'Here's a man who knows he can't ever be my lover or my husband. A man who's normal and free and strong and intelligent and charming. And who'd still rather be my friend, and just my friend, than any other woman's husband or lover.' He thought it would give me courage and comfort to know that. And he was right. It has—courage and comfort and pride. I haven't ever even argued with him about it. I've never told him he ought not to be wasting his life. I've never told him I couldn't be so selfish as to hold him. I wouldn't insult him by doing it. I know he doesn't think he's wasting his life. I know he doesn't think I'm selfish. I know he thinks it's all been worth while and wonderful. And it has!"

She turned slightly, bringing both arms around Helen. "So now you know," she said softly. "You know everything there is to know. I don't believe, in the long run, it'll make you unhappy, the

way learning about Zoe and Bob has made you unhappy. I think you're going to feel better here at Hunter's Green. If there's anything else I think of to say to you, that might clear things up more or make you feel better still, I'll come back here. But I'm going to Welby's room now. I wouldn't want him to wake and find I wasn't there. He'd worry. Good-night, Helen. Good-night, honey. Just put all these problems out of your mind and go to sleep. Everything will look all right to you again in the morning."

Helen was at peace again, a sort of glowing peace such as she had known only with Alfredo before. She lay, no longer shivering and shocked, but warm and reassured, feeling that since she had Veronique's friendship and support, she would not find the world hard or ugly or unendurable. But it was a long time before she was able to close her eyes. The little outdoor sounds that come with the beginning of morning were already creeping into the room, and there was a rim of rose at the horizon when at last her lids grew heavy. She let them droop, slowly, to open them still more slowly. Then she saw that Veronique was standing beside her again.

Ronnie did not have on so much as a dressing-gown or slippers this time. She had obviously come straight from her bed, in haste and dishevelment, her nightdress slipping from her shoulders, her feet bare. It was also evident that she thought nothing of this, that she did not even know it. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, and her breath was coming in quick gasps. She flung herself on her knees by the bed, and caught at Helen's hands, crying out in a voice of such poignancy that Helen was pierced through and through.

"It's all over! I can't believe it yet but it's true!"

Icy terror swept over Helen. She began to shiver again, so violently that she could hardly speak.

"*All over!* You mean that something terrible has happened? You mean that Welby's——"

"Something *terrible!* Something marvellous! The miracle he always said would happen! He doesn't know it yet himself and I don't know how to tell you this time. *But Welby has moved!*"

CHAPTER XXV

It was a long time before Ronnie could stop crying or talk coherently. Helen waited, smoothing her friend's hair and making little soothing sounds of love and thankfulness. She knew that this hysteria of joy must spend itself before Ronnie could regain the composure she had kept so long and at such terrible cost.

The room was bright with sunshine before she finally rose from her knees, drawing a deep breath and wiping the tears from her eyes. For a moment she stood still, as if uncertain whether she could speak collectedly, or move quietly, even yet. Then, with an obvious effort, she did first the one and then the other.

"I must go back," she said. "Welby will be waking at any moment now. I mustn't let him find that I'm gone. He'd worry." The words were almost the same as those she had spoken a few hours earlier, but the way in which she said them made them sound entirely different. "He moved in his sleep," she went on, "that's why he doesn't know yet what's happened. Doctor Foster told me there was about one chance in a thousand—no, in a million—that eventually he might, and that he would be more apt to do it when he was asleep than when he was awake, the first time, because he'd be more completely relaxed, less conscious of being bound and helpless. The movement was just a little twitching of the thighs, so slight that I wouldn't have felt it myself if I hadn't been waiting—and praying—for it all these years. I couldn't be sure—I didn't *dare* be sure—until after a few minutes the twitching began a second time, and that time there was a slight upward motion with it, too, almost as if he'd drawn his legs forward a little. It may be weeks before he does anything like that consciously. But he *can*. So by and by he will."

"Are you going to tell him what's happened?"

"I'm not sure yet. I'm going to wait and see."

She bent over and kissed Helen once, very quickly, then swiftly left the room. The household was already beginning to stir, and a few minutes later Helen heard Bennie pelting down the stairs, shouting to his mother, and saw him rush across the grounds towards the stables. A few minutes later, Ronnie, in her riding habit, appeared on the lawn herself. She took Bennie riding over the farm the first thing each morning; every acre of it was already as familiar to him as the back of his own hand, and he knew the seasonal crops and purposes of all the outbuildings and called all the horses and cattle and dogs by name. After breakfast, before he began his regular lessons, which Welby taught him, he told his father every-

thing that he had noticed, and everything that had especially interested him, in the course of that early morning ride. Later, when the school books were shut, and Welby had turned to the accounts, Bennie went back outdoors again to find his mother and tag around at her heels until his two o'clock dinner.

It was not until this meal began that Helen saw the family together for the first time, and there was nothing about the behaviour of any of them to indicate the shared and startling knowledge of a sudden phenomenon. Welby made some jesting remarks about his progress as a pedagogue— Didn't Helen think it was fantastic, he asked, that a man who had never willingly opened a book should develop into a school teacher? Helen said she was sure he was a wonderful teacher, judging from the facility—which she had already discovered—with which Bennie could read and write and add and subtract; it was amazing for a child of his age. She could see that Welby was pleased with her praise, both on his own account and on Bennie's, and, a little hesitantly, she said that if there were anything she could do to help with the teaching, she would be very glad to do it. Perhaps they would like to have Bennie learn Spanish—a little child sopped up a strange language like a sponge sopping up water, and a knowledge of Spanish was bound to be increasingly an asset, or at least so everyone said. The eagerness and enthusiasm with which both Ronnie and Welby accepted her offer encouraged her to make others. She had been wondering whether she could not pick up enough about the history and architecture of the place so that she could take the tourists off Ronnie's hands. She had noticed how often the sudden descent of these visitors on Hunter's Green interrupted Ronnie's schedule and prolonged her working days. And her own days were so empty. If only she had something definite to do—

Ronnie and Welby exchanged glances. "We didn't get you down here to work, we got you down here to rest," Ronnie objected, and Welby added, "You ought to be outdoors doing some riding yourself." But when she said she had rested so much already that she was nearly frantic, and that she was willing to walk for an hour every day, if that would satisfy them, but that she was not in the mood for riding, they were not insistent. They saw, quickly, that she would really feel there was some point and purpose to her existence if she could help with the tourists, and that very afternoon, under Ronnie's guidance, she escorted her first group through the house and garden and acted as their hostess while they took their tea on the terrace. At the end of a week she needed no prompting and no supervision. She had fitted gracefully and easily into a rôle which suited her to perfection, and in which she was surprisingly happy. The story of Hunter's Green never became stale or humdrum to her, and so she was always able to make it exciting to her hearers.

"Alicia and Ronald are buried side by side in the garden tomb," she said repeatedly, with fresh feeling every time, as she led the way down the box-bordered walk that followed the slope of the hill. "And after Ronald had died, his son, the one who was a baby when the Indians massacred his mother, threw the key into the river, so that no one should ever intrude upon the eternal peace which they share. It is a lovely story, isn't it? Yes, indeed, I am going to show you Alicia's bracelet when we go back to the drawing-room—the one with 'Memory More True Than Mine' engraved on the inside. But first I'm going to show you the 'hidden statue'—that has a story about it, too. The second Ronald had a very lovely daughter, Aurora, but he was so jealous of her beauty, and so determined that no other man should ever see it, that he kept her very secluded, almost hidden, and discouraged every suitor to her hand. So she married secretly. Her father did not know she was married, and one night he surprised her in the garden with her husband, whom he took for her lover, and tried to kill them both. But Aurora stepped so swiftly in front of her husband that it was only her heart that was pierced. Afterwards, her father was overcome with remorse, and he had this life-size statue of her placed on the spot where she had fallen. It was copied from a portrait of her, so the resemblance is very faithful. We always call it the 'hidden statue.' I'm sure you would never find it by yourselves. I'm going to part the box and show it to you, and afterwards, if you like, I will lead you off a little way, and then you can see whether you can get back to it yourselves. No one has ever succeeded in doing so yet. Yes, Doctor Foster's place, 'Aurora,' was named after this lovely unfortunate girl. That is not open to the public, but you can see the orchards and the stables quite plainly from the road and get a glimpse of the house, framed by splendid old trees. It is a lovely drive over there. Perhaps you would like to take it, after tea. You are going to stay for tea on the terrace, aren't you?"

Everyone wanted to stay for tea on the terrace with Helen. She herself, in her exquisite white mourning, was the embodiment of youthful and tragic romance, and she interpreted the tragic tales of a romantic past with touching and telling pathos. At the end of a fortnight the fame of the ethereal young widow who had "taken over" at Hunter's Green had spread far and wide, and the number of visitors to the place had more than doubled. Ronnie and Welby, somewhat staggered at the turn of events, asked her, with real concern, if she did not feel she was doing too much.

"Oh no! I like it. But I do think Uncle Tam and Susie and Florine and Cleo will need someone to help them if we keep on serving so many meals. Don't you think we'd better make inquiries about getting two more maids or a married couple? I think it will pay. We've taken in a lot of money in the last few days."

She had declined to be responsible for the tourist accounts, in-

sisting that Welby must continue to do these, along with the stock farm accounts, as he had in the past. But she had watched the piling profits with a feeling of possessive pride, and now, when he said jokingly that if she kept on turning over so much money to him he would need an assistant after all, she volunteered.

"All right. If you can learn to be a teacher, I guess I can learn to be an accountant. Only you'll have to be patient with me, Welby. I never was any good at arithmetic."

"You and I both grew up thinking we weren't good at anything, didn't we, Helen? Now Ronnie's got us both going at such a rate we're out to show the world after all."

He laughed, as he had spoken, heartily. But the laugh died away quickly, leaving a look of bewilderment in its wake. Ronnie, who was watching him closely, leaned forward and took his hand.

"What's the matter, Welby? Is anything wrong?"

"Must be. Wrong or queer or something. When I laughed then I got to laughing all over. That is, there was a funny tingle all the way down to my toes. It was *feeling*."

"Of course it was. What's queer about that? Haven't you always told me you'd feel again some day?"

"But, Ronnie, I didn't know it would start like *this*! And you didn't, either. It couldn't have!"

"It didn't. It started nearly three weeks ago, when you were asleep. Your legs began to twitch, and then you drew them up. You've done it several times since then. The last time I thought perhaps you knew it. You didn't seem more than half asleep."

"I wasn't. But I thought I was dreaming."

"You weren't. It was real."

"But, Ronnie, if this was real——"

For a moment he looked at her incredulously. Then the expression of wonder on his face turned to one of joy. He held out his arms and Ronnie, without a word, sank into them. They had both entirely forgotten about Helen. She rose, quietly, and went out of the room, stumbling a little as she walked. She could not see very well because she was so blinded by tears.

The following Saturday Zoe telephoned to say that she would be down for the week-end, and Helen, who had answered the telephone, said she would walk down to the end of the driveway and meet her there. Zoe tried to discourage the plan; she did not know exactly when she would get there, she said, and, besides, what was the point? They would have plenty of time to talk after she got to the house. She did not make any headway with her objections. Helen was in one of her rare moods of obstinacy, the sort of mood which forced Zoe to remember that Helen and Bob were brother and sister, and that there were certain points of resemblance between them. Helen made it clear that she did not in the least mind

waiting at the turnpike. There was a nice shady clump of trees, beside one of the gates, where she could sit and rest. Ronnie and Welby were always telling her she ought to take more exercise, and it was so stupid to go walking when there was no special objective; there would be a special objective in meeting Zoe. Very well, then, Zoe would be along as near noon as she could. She had just finished her new piece for the *Tribunal*. So far as she knew there was nothing to keep her in town.

It was actually only a little after twelve when she drew up at the place on the turnpike where the side-road leading to Hunter's Green branched off. She was wearing a suède-smooth outfit exactly the colour of her hair, looking unusually smart and successful, and showing that she felt it. Helen, dressed in spotless white, with a white grosgrain ribbon finished in a flat bow binding her fair hair, and a large old-fashioned white parasol folded on the grass beside her, was sitting calmly under the clump of trees awaiting her sister-in-law. She looked cool and composed; she also looked much healthier and happier than when Zoe had last seen her, and quite entrancingly lovely. The thought flashed through Zoe's mind that there was something about Helen's look that suggested the exhilaration of a love affair, and wondered if it were possible that already—Helen herself quickly dispelled the idea.

"Hello, sweetness! What's on your mind?"

"Lots of things. Where's Bob?"

"Why, I never said he was coming with me! What gave you the idea that he was?"

"Why should anything give me the idea that he wasn't? I thought he always came down here with you."

"Well, he used to. But he's never cared for riding the way I do, or felt as much interest in the stock farm. He's gone down to Jefferson Island with a bunch of Democratic senators for the week-end."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry!"

"You ought to be terribly glad. Bob's furious with you for letting your father take over that Mexican oil money. He's set to scold you hard the first time he sees you. In fact, he's so mad I'm not sure he won't spank you hard."

"It's my own money," Helen said stubbornly. "Alfredo always meant I should do what I wanted to with my own money. That's why he gave me money of my own. I wanted to give this to Father, so I did. Besides, Bob wouldn't have had any time to scold me on this visit. I've got some wonderful news that's going to take me lots of time to tell. I wanted to tell it to you both."

"Well, tell it to me, and I'll pass it on to Bob as soon as he's sobered up after his week-end. Don't look at me like that, sweetness. Ladies rather than liquor are Bob's weakness, as you know. But those senatorial shindigs are pretty wet."

"I don't think Bob has any weaknesses. I think you're very unjust to him."

"For Pete's sake, don't let's start arguing about that again! If you don't tell me your great piece of news pretty soon, it'll spoil."

"Welby's begun to have feeling in his legs and feet. He's begun to move."

"But he can't have! It's impossible!"

"No, it isn't. It's true. It seems that Doctor Foster, and the specialists he called in, told Ronnie at the very beginning there was a chance in a thousand that the spinal cord might be just badly bruised instead of completely crushed or wholly severed. But the only way they could have found out, for certain, was by an operation which would almost surely have been fatal—the leading neurologist who came here on Welby's case had recently performed two of them, when the families insisted, and both patients had died. One was an only child of devoted parents and didn't live to get off the operating-table, and the other was a very prominent statesman who survived not more than a day or two. So naturally the neurologist advised against the operation, and Ronnie took his advice. She wasn't given any encouragement to watch for improvement, but she's been doing it secretly all these years, because Welby's kept telling her he was sure he was going to get well. I don't know whether he believed it or not, or whether he said it just to give her hope, but anyway that's what he did, and she's never lost heart. She came into my room the first night I was here to tell me there'd been a slight twitching. Welby was asleep when it happened. But Ronnie wasn't. So she felt it. You know she's always insisted on sharing his bed."

"My God, what a story!"

"Oh, Zoe, if you could have seen her that night! Overcome with joy, but crying so hard she was beside herself! Think of all the nights she's lain awake, close to Welby, hoping against hope that this would happen, and losing hope because it didn't, and still fighting on with no help from anyone and no money to make the way a little easier."

"You better stop. You'll have me blubbering like a baby myself in a minute."

"Well, you see now why I didn't want you to come to the house without preparing you. I tried to put it all in a letter, but I tore up sheet after sheet, because of course I can't write, Zoe, spontaneously, the way you would if you saw a thing like that happen. After Ronnie had felt Welby twitch she naturally watched him like a cat to see what would happen next, because she'd been told that would be only the symptom. And not long after that he felt a tingling sensation. He made a joke of it at first, but he couldn't joke more than a minute, it meant too much. And then Ronnie told him she'd been expecting it, and they simply fell into each

other's arms. I was in the room, and we'd all been talking together when this tingling began. But they entirely forgot about me. They didn't even know I existed."

"Helen, you're not saying a single thing to make me feel any less like crying."

"That's what I keep telling you, that I couldn't let you see them until you knew, until you'd had time to get used to the idea. Of course, now Doctor Foster has been over and a physician has been down from Baltimore, too. By the time they got here Welby had been conscious of warmth all over, and he'd tried to move his toes—he hadn't succeeded, but at least he knew they belonged to him again, as he put it, and he says he's sure he'll soon be able to wiggle them. The doctors say the next sign of improvement will probably be that Welby can begin to look after himself, I mean that Veronique won't have to take care of him as if he were a baby any more. Of course, she's had to do that all this time, too. She says Welby is trying to make another joke out of that, telling her that she got Bennie out of diapers in record time, and that she simply won't know what to do with herself when she can sit around like a lady without thinking that at any moment she'll have to clean up a mess or empty slops. You'd think it would sound disgusting to hear anyone say such a thing, but——"

"I don't think it's disgusting. I think it's heroic and overwhelming. But I'm only just beginning to realize everything she's been through. Somehow I never thought of all that."

"Well, none of us have, I'm afraid. Except maybe Dabney Turberville and Father Flynn. I guess they both realize. And the doctors, of course. They all know what she's been through. They said she never could stand it. And she's stood it for nearly seven years."

"And how long is it going to take before Welby's actually well?"

"Oh, he hasn't been promised that he'll be actually well—at least, not what you and I would call actually well. Doctor Foster says that if things take their normal course, the power of moving his muscles and controlling them will keep gradually extending further and further down until it reaches his feet, but that these will probably hang limp, that he'll have to have braces underneath them. In course of time he may be able to walk a little—with crutches, or even with a cane. And there are exercises that perhaps he can take—it's still much too soon to tell what or when."

"And I suppose by the time he can do all this——"

"Yes, probably. That is, they hope so—— You know, Zoe, I always thought that Alfredo and I had the most wonderful romance of anyone in the world. But if everything comes out all right for Ronnie and Welby in the end, I may actually change my mind. Because Alfredo and I didn't have anything to *overcome*, except a

little parental opposition and a little lack of adaptability on my part. Most people don't have anything worse than that. You and Bob, for instance. Of course, your handicaps weren't the same as mine. But they weren't any more serious. And yet sometimes you act as if——"

"Suppose we don't talk about Bob and me today, sweetness. I'd rather not."

"There isn't anything the *matter*, is there, Zoe? Not really?"

"No, not really. Except that I'm going to South America very soon and that Bob still doesn't like the idea. And that I've told him if he doesn't like it he can lump it, or words to that effect. But please don't let's get started on that. I said *please*, sweetness. I'd rather hear about you. I haven't heard a word about you yet. Is all this brightness you're radiating vicarious happiness? The result of rejoicing about Welby and Ronnie? I thought when I first looked at you that you might have been up to something yourself. You'd better confess!"

Helen's lips parted and closed again, as if she were struggling with the effort of repression. When she did speak it was with uncharacteristic coolness and impersonality.

"I am very happy about Ronnie and Welby," she said. "But I'm not a bit happy about you and Bob. I won't say any more than that, since you don't want me to, but I'm bound you shall know that much. I can't bear to just stand by watching you both deliberately wrecking your marriage, and yet that's what you're making me do. I'm glad I can be a little useful here." She outlined, briefly, her successful activities with the tourists, rumours of which had already begun to reach Zoe's ears, and her co-operation with Welby in the matter of teaching Bennie and keeping accounts. "I'm helping with the candy and the jelly and the apple butter, too," Helen went on, "and I sit with old Mrs. Endicott sometimes, to keep her company. Of course, her mind wanders a good deal. She tells the same stories over and over again. Sometimes she's hardly finished one before she begins it again. And they're all about the glories of Greystone Towers, and the wonderful people who used to be in politics, and how her only daughter disappointed her by marrying a Corsican brigand instead of an English earl, and how her trustees robbed her of her money. It's pitiful to hear her, but it's pretty tedious, too. I think that was another thing that was wearing on Ronnie, and that I've been able to help her with—listening to her grandmother ramble on and on. Mrs. Endicott has a practical nurse now, all the time, who's very kind and patient and capable, but naturally Ronnie felt that someone besides a nurse ought to be with her as much as possible."

"And are you planning to go on indefinitely guiding tourists and teaching a small child and keeping accounts and making candy and sitting with a senile old woman?"

There was a slightly sarcastic edge to Zoe's voice. Helen coloured and winced under it, but she answered imperturbably.

"I'm contented doing it. Is there anything wrong with it?"

"Oh, there's nothing in the least wrong with it! In fact, it's quite noble. But it doesn't sound to me very satisfactory or suitable as a permanent occupation for a beautiful young lady with nearly a million in her own right."

"I hadn't meant to make it a permanent occupation, except perhaps the candy-making. I believe that can be developed. In fact, I'd meant to watch very carefully to make sure I wasn't in the way. Of Ronnie and Welby, I mean. I know that by and by I probably will be. But until I am—— It isn't as if there were anything else I wanted to do or anywhere I wanted to go."

"Why don't you buy yourself one of those smart little yellow brick houses on Massachusetts Avenue near the one where Giles used to live and get yourself a cook like Virgie and go in for being a great success as a merry widow? You could give every fascinating divorcee in Washington a run for her money."

"But I don't feel merry and I never wanted to be smart. I think I'll probably live very quietly in the country all the rest of my life. Perhaps I'll buy myself a little lodge up in the Blue Ridge Mountains somewhere."

"Don't talk like a little fool, sweetness. You know you won't do anything of the sort."

"You all thought I was a fool because I wanted to marry Alfredo. And he made me divinely happy. Of course, I'll never be divinely happy again. But at least I've learned enough not to let anyone try to run my life for me a second time by telling me I'm a fool."

She rose quietly, smoothed down her white dress, patted the bow on her hair, and unfurled her large old-fashioned frilly parasol.

"I'm going to walk back to the house," she said evenly. "Now that I've told you what happened to Welby there's no reason why you shouldn't go on there alone. There doesn't seem to be anything more for you and me to say to each other on which we can agree. I'll see you later."

The week-end was not an entire success, largely because Zoe's mood was so variable. As usual, she was an entertaining visitor, bringing with her a sense of zestful nearness to exciting happenings from which Hunter's Green was usually remote. Everything was going swimmingly with her writing. She had now drafted two little sketches, both inspired by the Casa Catalina, which she wanted to show to Helen; if Helen approved of them she was going to send them to *Harkness Magazine*, which was now vying with the *Tribunal* in an effort to secure contributions from her. One was called "Indian Plantain," and told the poignant story of a woman who had died rejoicing after ten years of childless marriage in

bringing a beautiful child into the world; the other was called "The White Mantilla," and told the story of the lovely phantom who flitted through the galleries she once had graced, trailing disaster after her as she trailed her scarf. Both had caught the tragic beauty imprisoned in the place where Helen had dwelt in such unsubstantial happiness. When she handed the drafts back to Zoe she was so much moved that she could hardly speak.

"You've never written anything so exquisite before," she finally managed to say. "Of course, I'll be proud to have them published—just as I was consoled, as much as I could be by anything, when you wrote 'Carnage at Coyoacan.' It helps to have such happenings immortalized the way you can do it. But when you have it in you to write like that, Zoe, why do you do the other sort?"

"When I began, I had to write what I could sell and I had a vindictive viewpoint besides," Zoe answered frankly. "It isn't strange, considering the way I'd fought tooth and nail to get ahead. Afterwards, I suppose I had just acquired the habit. I did soften a little for a while, under the influence of romance of one sort and another. I suppose that style didn't last because the romance didn't. I don't know where this new style comes from or whether that's going to last either. But we'll try it out— Listen, I must tell you about going over to New York to the party that was given on the *Normandie* before she sailed back to France after her maiden voyage. There were four special cars for officials of the press, and the festivities started before we left Washington. And on the ship—well, if there ever was super-celebration, that was one! First we had cocktails, and then we made a tour of inspection and then we had dinner. I'll never forget the sight of that dining-room when we walked down the stairs into it, and then on and on across its endless length, between crystal columns lighted from within. If there ever was a vision of fairyland on earth, it was enclosed by those columns! When I thought of the dingy old *Leviathan*, that Isabel used to think was the last word, it made me laugh. The *Leviathan* had immensity and pomposity, which was what counted in those days; it was like the dowagers and politicians who travelled on it. But the *Normandie* has splendour."

"Did Isabel go over to this party?"

"No, she wasn't invited, which was a pretty heavy blow to her. I took pains to find out, because I thought the reason she didn't show up in New York might have been because there was too much for her to do at the Embassy, in connection with the official entertaining for the French crowd that came down; but her name wasn't on the list. There was a beautiful medal as a souvenir at every place, with the ship itself engraved on one side, and symbolic figures of a seahorse and a seamaiden on the other; and I never saw such a dinner in all my life—caviare and fillet of sole and roast duckling and four or five other courses, each served with a vintage wine

that was incomparable. Four or five Cabinet officers and senators and their wives were at the head table, not to mention Ambassadors and Ministers and the wife of the President of France; and I don't believe any one of them ever saw such a spread before in such a setting. We went back to the lounge after dinner—that's as bizarre as the dining-room is beautiful, with glassy gold and black wains covered with futuristic designs, and rose-coloured needlepoint furnishings, and huge Aubusson rugs, which had been rolled up for dancing. After the dance there was a show in the theatre, with the greatest French artists performing, and finally a supper, or a breakfast, I'm not sure which you'd call it, that capped the climax. It was daylight when I got back to the Plaza."

"Don't you and Bob stay at the Commodore any longer?"

"Oh, Bob always does. But he didn't go over to this party. Something very important came up about the Frazier-Lemke Bill that day, and he thought he ought to cover it. So I went to the Plaza. I like to look out over the Park. It's the only place in New York that reminds me of Paris. As a matter of fact I came very near going back to France on the *Normandie*. I would have, if all my South American plans hadn't been along so far already."

She began an outline of her itinerary, and made it sound so fascinating that they got out an old atlas, and sat up until all hours, looking up the route she was to take, and tracing it, so that they would be able to follow it afterwards. But in spite of the vicarious thrill her writings and her wanderings supplied, she herself created an atmosphere of unrest in a place which had hitherto been peaceful. She rode most of Saturday afternoon and twice on Sunday, starting off abruptly each time, and spent part of the intervening hours going over balance-sheets with Welby and discussing the purchase of more stock with Veronique. There was no disharmony about these conversations; everything was going well with their joint venture and they were agreed about its development. But she stressed the fact that it might be a long time before she could take up details in regard to the management of the stock farm again, and that therefore they must be prepared now to meet all its requirements meticulously; and there was something about the way she said this that was sharp and imperious.

Helen went with Zoe and Ronnie as they made their rounds of the stables, which she herself regarded appreciatively but amateurishly. It was a perfect day, and she enjoyed walking over the green grounds, with their all-embracing view of fertile fields, verdant trees and blue mountains, and in seeing the manifold evidences of perfect order and excellent management revealed by every paddock and outbuilding. But she played with a fuzzy, grey kitten, which was chasing stray wisps from the bales of hay in the loft, while Zoe and Ronnie went through the brood mares' stable stall by stall. In a general way, Helen had always admired its lay-out, in the shape

of a double L, with the stalls opening on a shaded gallery at one side and on an open field at the other; but it was not until Ronnie had spoken to her of the fact that there was always room in it for Gallant Lady, that she realized it should be fuller. Now she was vaguely relieved when she heard Zoe say she thought they might venture on the purchase of two more brood mares.

"That eight thousand dollar sale you pulled off last week was a good one, Ronnie. I never supposed Wing Victory would bring half as much as that. A few more such sales and we'll be all set."

"Yes, we will."

"Some of these rich Yankees will pay almost anything for a well-trained hunter who practically takes care of his rider in the field. I believe you can develop that kind of a market."

"I've been trying to, but I'll try harder. I'm glad you're willing to risk the extra investment, Zoe. Of course I couldn't without you."

When Helen stopped playing with the kitten, she found that Zoe and Ronnie had already gone on to the colt barn, and when she caught up with them they were standing in the oval exercise ring encircling the stalls and discussing the possibilities of showing at Saratoga. Zoe was inclined to favour it; that was where the biggest prices were sure to be paid for yearlings, she insisted, and quoted the successes of several other breeders living in the vicinity. But Ronnie did not think they themselves should attempt Saratoga yet; it would be too much of a strain on Welby to go there, she maintained; and she could not go without him.

"You mean you won't go without him, not that you can't."

"All right then, I won't."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't."

"That's for me to decide. You decide for yourself how much you want to leave Bob. Suppose you let me decide for myself whether I want to leave Welby at all or not."

"You sound very Corsican today, countess."

"I am very Corsican, thank you, Miss Wing."

Helen did not go on with them to the stallion stable, where the signs warning visitors to "keep out" had always alarmed her, and where the framed pedigree charts, fastened beside each stall, had always baffled her. Besides, she was afraid a quarrel was imminent, and she knew how important it was for Ronnie not to quarrel with Zoe. She sat down on the grass and watched the iron weathervane on the colt stable, which represented a jockey riding with hounds at his heels; a light breeze swung it back and forth, and the movement diverted her. When Ronnie and Zoe returned from the stallion stable, she saw that something had apparently diverted them, too. They were laughing, their momentary impatience with each other overcome or forgotten. Helen suspected that the joke was rather ribald. She did not ask them to tell her what it was.

And though Ronnie, as usual, had disarmed her anxiety almost as soon as she experienced it, she worried more and more about her sister-in-law as the day wore on. Zoe was liberal as well as practical in her outlook towards the partnership, and in general she gave Ronnie a fairly free hand; the more she talked about future plans the more evident this became; but she kept interrupting herself abruptly, and she changed the subject when any question arose that was even remotely connected with her home and her husband. From Helen's point of view she was also rather tardy in telling her hosts that she had been deeply thrilled to learn of Welby's encouraging symptoms and that she was wholeheartedly glad to see his obvious improvement. When she did mention this, however, she did so feelingly and cordially, adding that Ronnie too was looking better than in years; her lightened labours and lessened anxiety were evidently both having a salutary result. If she could only be persuaded to go up to town long enough to buy herself a new outfit—her clothes all gave the effect that they had been bought out of a Sears Roebuck catalogue, by mail, years before——

"Most of them were," Ronnie replied. "Every now and then I do have something sent down from Washington on approval, but I usually end by sending it back again. There are so many other ways to spend money, and there's been so little of it—there's more now though," she added, looking at Helen with a grateful smile. "And I'm more in the mood for dressing up. Maybe a little later I'll take a day off and have an orgy of shopping."

"A day! You need to take a week at least. Drive up with me tomorrow and start in. I'll send you back with Zally whenever you want to come."

Ronnie shook her head, and Helen knew that the prospect of the most beautiful clothes in the world and plenty of money with which to buy them would not suffice to get her away from Hunter's Green at this breath-taking stage of Welby's improvement. But Zoe, who hated slovenliness and shabbiness, as she always had, was annoyed at Ronnie's obstinacy and indifference. She was also annoyed with Ronnie for going to church in the morning, instead of going riding with her, and with Bennie because he woke her up at such an ungodly hour, and with Helen because she spent the entire day escorting strangers over the place. She was annoyed with Dabney Turberville and Jett Dabney and Stewart Bainbridge because they stayed so long after Sunday dinner, and with Mrs. Endicott because the old lady waylaid her in the upper hall and kept her there, in the grasp of her claw-like hands, for a whole hour, talking about the holocaust towards which the country was heading under the misguidance of "that man." In fact, Zoe's irritation, which spared no one except Welby, was so general and so evident, that none of them felt sorry when she finally left.

She did not come back again that summer. When they next

heard from her, it was in a long radiogram, to say that she was "rolling down to Rio," that she was whiling away her time on ship-board by writing a story about the imprisoned water spirit of Hunter's Green, and that Helen had better look in on Bob once in a while. Helen did not want to leave Hunter's Green herself, so she wrote Bob, begging him to come down there, and after a considerable delay, received a brief note from him, saying that he was too busy, that Congress seemed to be stuck for the summer, and that she had better meet him some day for lunch in the Pall Mall Room at the Raleigh. Reluctantly, she decided to leave her various charges for a day and do so, making her excursion into a shopping trip for both Veronique and herself. She enjoyed driving the little car she had bought for herself, so precipitately, in Alexandria, and she was far less indifferent to feminine finery than Ronnie. She made an early start and spent an exciting morning along Connecticut Avenue. After lunch her heart was no longer in her purchases, but she went on with them until she reached the end of her list, and came back to Hunter's Green laden with cardboard boxes of every sort and description, shaking their contents out of tissue paper, and spreading these from one end to the other of the double drawing-rooms. When she and Ronnie had finished their dress rehearsal, however, she put the dresses and wraps into neat piles, and the hats and stockings and underwear back into their boxes, and began to speak soberly about her brother.

"I'm terribly worried about Bob. He doesn't seem a bit well."

"In what way, exactly?"

"I couldn't say, exactly. He drank three cocktails before lunch, and I never saw him do that before. Not that there's any special reason why he shouldn't. And he smoked one cigarette after another—chain smoking. I never saw him do that either. He didn't seem to notice what he was eating, and he left me twice to go to the telephone, inside of half an hour. He scolded me about giving the oil money to Father, just as Zoe said he would, though I've given lots of money to Father before, and Bob hasn't minded in the least. Aside from that, he kept talking in jerks, about nothing at all, except that he told me several smutty stories. Bob never used to tell me smutty stories."

"None of it sounds much like him. But he's probably working like a draft horse. It's a pretty big undertaking to run a news bureau like his single-handed."

"Yes. I said I was sorry he had so much to do, now that Zoe was away, and he said he was used to it, by this time—— She is away, you know, longer and longer every year. And I asked what he'd heard from her, and he said he hadn't heard anything yet. That is, in the way of a letter. The pieces were coming through regularly enough, and they were swell. But he didn't know how much longer she'd be satisfied with sending all her stuff to the syndicate. He

thought pretty soon she'd begin to send the best of it to magazines, and just give the gleanings to 'Capital Kaleidoscope.' He said when she did that she might just as well stop altogether. Ruthven had told her long ago that she couldn't do justice to more than one line of work at once, and Bob thinks that Ruthven was right."

"He probably was. But what would happen to 'Capital Kaleidoscope' if Zoe did draw her stuff out."

"I asked Bob that, and his answer bothered me more than anything else he said. He told me it could get along all right without her. He told me he could keep it going alone—that is, with the help Beverley and Bert can give him. And he said it was just as well he felt that way about it, because, when Zoe left this time, she didn't say anything at all about coming home."

CHAPTER XXVI

BENNIE had tumbled in and out of the garden pool, casually and contentedly, from the time he was two years old. He was at home in the water, and took to it so naturally that though Veronique kept a watchful eye and a ready hand on his first wading and splashing and jumping, none of this had caused her anxiety, and presently he achieved a technique of movement all his own. It was a sort of dog paddle, graceless but surprisingly speedy, and he revelled in plunging into the pool at one end and churning through it to the other, emerging, sputtering and chuckling, his black hair streaming over his round face, his chubby legs dripping. Often he drew his mother in after him, his glee redoubling if he could catch her by surprise and tip her over backwards; she never minded a wetting, and she took her son's activities very much in her stride, as she did everything else, without giving an undue amount of thought either to them or to their setting. But after Helen had become a more or less permanent addition to the household, she suggested that it was high time the pool was modernized and enlarged if Bennie were going to spend half his time in it, and if it were to prove a definite attraction to the ever-increasing number of paying guests who flocked to Hunter's Green. It would be better still, she added, if the one in the garden near the house could be kept small, ornamental and private, and a large new one be built at the bottom of the terraces. She could see just how this new pool would look, shining over turquoise blue tiles, with great ivy-filled pottery jars adorning it at the corners, and gay little iron tables and chairs set up under striped umbrellas, and scattered over the lush green lawn that surrounded it. Bath-houses could be concealed in the adjacent shrubbery, and eventually some kind of a solarium could be added, too. The more she thought of this the more the idea appealed to her, and eventually she asked if she might not be allowed to undertake these improvements on her own responsibility. Alfredo had proposed to her beside the garden pool, she confided to Veronique and Welby, and therefore she would have a special sentiment in beautifying it as a memorial to him, while the development of the new pool would represent her contribution to a partnership in which she was rapidly becoming more closely connected than her brother and sister-in-law. Veronique and Welby consented, gratefully and without false pride, to her plan, and it was carried out the following spring, when she had been at Hunter's Green about a year.

With the caution characteristic of children in connection with the unfamiliar, Bennie had regarded the new pool distrustfully

during the construction period. Even when it was finished, and the clear water was flowing smoothly over the turquoise tiles, he made no move to plunge into it. For the first time, it was apparent that pressure must be brought to bear to get him into the water. His father, sitting between his mother and the lady he had now come to call Aunt Helen, sought to apply this.

"Come on, Bennie. We're all waiting to see you christen the pool. And we can't sit here all day."

"It's a horrid pool," Bennie said disdainfully. As he spoke, he scuffed at the gravel walk with his toes, and gazed resentfully up over the terraces in the direction of the old garden, where the pool he really loved lay shimmering under the lilies.

"It's not a horrid pool. It's a very nice pool. You're a horrid little boy to say such a thing. Just see how deep the water is!"

"I don't like deep water. I like water with goldfish in it," Bennie persisted, still gazing away from the turquoise depths before him.

"If you don't jump in there this minute, I'm going to ask your mother to throw you in. I'll give you until I count three. One—two——"

"Don't say it, Daddy! I don't want Mummy to throw me in. I'm afraid of it."

In all of Bennie's brief life he had never admitted or revealed fear before. But now it showed, unmistakably, in his stubborn little face and shrinking little body. He backed away from the pool, and flung himself against his father's knees.

"You come in with me, Daddy. If you'll come with me, I won't be afraid, I'll go."

"Bennie, you *are* a horrid little boy. You know your poor daddy can't swim or ride or do any of the other wonderful things you do outdoors. You know you have to do them for him. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Bennie had never heard his Aunt Helen, who was a very gentle, lovely lady, speak so sternly. He hung his head. But he continued to cling to his father.

"If you tried, Daddy, couldn't you get into the pool with me? If you tried ever so hard?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't, Bennie. You see——"

"But you don't know that you couldn't, do you, Welby?"

It was Mummy who was speaking now, Mummy talking in the kind of voice she had used when she taught him to ride. Bennie listened to her with avidity, turning from his father to his mother.

"Helen could go up to the house and telephone Doctor Foster and ask Uncle Tam to come down here, so we'd have a man to help lift you out, just in case—— But I believe we could get you into the water all right. And I believe if we could, it would hold you up and that you could exercise in it."

"If you believe that, Ronnie, I'm willing to try. I'm willing to

try to do anything you think I can. And if it would help Bennie to get over this foolish fear of the new pool——”

“Oh Daddy, please!”

Helen went slowly up the tiers of terraces, glad of an excuse for getting away from the intimacy and poignancy of the scene before her. Of course, Doctor Foster might be out; she might not be able to reach him. Of course, he might say “no.” Of course, even if he said “yes, it was worth a trial,” Welby might not be able to make it. There had been nothing swift or startling at any point about his progress. He had been able to “look after himself” for nearly a year now, and for six months he had been trying, with slowly increasing success, to use crutches. He wore braces on his feet, which did not bother him, but he had not yet been able to manipulate a cane, or to bear down with his whole weight. Veronique had massaged his legs tirelessly, but so far he had made no movement with them, except the original one of drawing them up a little, and the added one of advancing them slightly when they dragged behind him. But this latest faculty was still so feeble and uncertain that Helen did not see how it could help to sustain him in the water. If it did, however, that would make a startling point in his progress, that would be a definite step towards assured recovery. The intimacy and poignancy of the scene she had just left would be nothing compared to the degree these qualities would reach as time went on. She rejoiced beyond measure for Ronnie’s sake and for Welby’s that this was so. But she was not quite sure what the result would be as far as she herself was concerned.

She looked up towards the solid spread of the great stone house, which for fifteen months now had been her home. From the beginning, it had given her a sense of security and serenity for which she knew she would be everlastingly grateful, whenever she looked back on this interval in her life. But she had always known it was only an interval, and now she thought this was almost over. In a practical way, no less than in an intangible way, she was already needed less than she had been at first. During the winter Mrs. Endicott had died, and now that she was relieved of her grandmother’s care, Ronnie’s heavy burden had been further lifted. A few thousand dollars still remained of the millions the old woman had once controlled, and these had come into Ronnie’s possession without delay or dispute; the quarters she had inhabited were also available for other occupancy, and they were filled all the time. The manner in which the widespreading house was built, with a great central hall running through its entire length, and spacious rooms on either side of this, made it readily adaptable for division: The double drawing-rooms had been set aside for the paying guests, and the “morning-room” which led out of them, in a one-story wing, had been reconstructed into a breakfast-room. It was there that

they took their meals, unless they wished to do so in their own quarters, or unless Ronnie and Welby gave them a special invitation to join the family in the great dining-room on the other side of the hall, which, like the library leading out of it, and the gun-room which was in the wing corresponding to that formed by the "morning-room," had been reserved for private use. Another wide hall bisected the rooms upstairs, and those on one side were now occupied by Helen, Ronnie, Welby and Bennie, those on the other side by the paying guests whose waiting-list had now grown to formidable proportions. The original kitchen, connected with the house in the rear by two branching covered galleries, was still in use, and the rest of the servants' quarters was also separate. Four additional small stone buildings—the old smoke-house, the old school-house, the old office and the old creamery—were now used as additional habitations for guests and brought even higher prices than the rooms in the main house. There was a privacy and picturesqueness about them that was very appealing; they had quaint fireplaces, mellow panelling, delightful corner cupboards and many-paned windows. Elderly couples and bridal pairs alike found them irresistible. When she discovered this, Ronnie had ruthlessly raised the rent.

Such an establishment inevitably represented an immense amount of care and supervision, and a year earlier Ronnie would not have been able to undertake this, with everything else that she had to do. Now that Welby was better, Bennie older, and her grandmother gone, the picture had changed immeasurably. Besides, Helen relieved her of much of the management, and the domestic staff had been substantially enlarged and represented great capability combined with great willingness. Bob had let the Alexandria house and moved to a club in town, and Helen, learning of this arrangement in the nick of time, had asked Pearl Gray, Opal and Zally to come to Hunter's Green before the prospective tenants Bob had secured found an opportunity of annexing them. They had all been Clarke County "people" in the beginning, and they were overjoyed to be back there; Florina, Cleo and Uncle Tam now had the sort of collaboration they most liked and needed in their labours; and Susie was free to devote more and more time to the concoction of the candy, jelly and apple butter which were becoming much in demand, and which were distributed as staple products of Hunter's Green embellished with a colourful label which proclaimed them to be "Susie's Sweets."

It was Helen who had thought of this, and she was delighted at the results of her resourcefulness; she helped Susie in the old still-room which was now set apart for the cooking and packing of orchard products, and attended to orders and shipments herself. Moreover, her first attempt at household staff enlargement having turned out so well, she took a still bolder step. She tracked down

Virgie, found that this peerless cook had never been "satisfactorily settled" since Giles left Washington, and asked her to come to Hunter's Green also. The luring of Virgie had represented more of a feat than the annexation of Pearl Gray's family, for she had always lived in the city, and she was afraid of being lonesome. But Helen had not lived in Latin-America five years for nothing. She knew how to cope with Virgie's lonesomeness by a magic method, and Virgie was now queening it over the kitchen and quarters with such "settled satisfaction," not only to herself but to all others concerned, that there was never any question raised of her possible departure,

With Virgie at the helm, Ronnie might conceivably manage without Helen's help in the near future; for the time would come, sooner or later, when the number of paying guests could be pared down, and Ronnie could demand, and receive, more service for herself. She could also reduce the number of days when transient tourists would be permitted to wander through the house and grounds, and concentrate her efforts on those who stayed longer and paid better. Undoubtedly, there must be some pleasant well-born young girl in the neighbourhood who could easily be taught to act as a guide, to serve in a general secretarial capacity, and to supervise the manufacture and dispatch of "Susie's Sweets." Helen could not instantly think of anyone herself, but she felt sure that either Father Flynn or Dabney Turberville could advise her. She had come to count a great deal on both of them——

Still turning these matters over in her mind, she went into the gun-room and picked up the telephone. Yes, Doctor Foster was at home, a husky, pleasant voice informed her, and almost instantly she was put through to him. There was an unexpected development in Welby's case, she told him, and briefly outlined the circumstances of the scene by the pool. Doctor Foster did not hesitate at all. He would be over at once, he said, and bring two bathing suits with him. He would like to help christen the pool himself, and it was so long since Welby had needed anything of the sort, that no doubt the last suit he had worn had long since been devoured by moths, in spite of Helen's good housekeeping. Oh, no doubt, Helen agreed, laughing. Well, she would send Uncle Tam down to the pool to say that Doctor Foster was on his way, and she would get into her own bathing suit. They might as well make this a real party, while they were about it.

The afternoon mail had come in while she was talking, and when she went back to the hall, she found that Pearl Gray had arranged it, with characteristic care, in neat little piles, and that a letter addressed to herself in Zoe's handwriting was lying on top of her own correspondence. She took it up to her room and read it before she began to undress; she still felt a slight shyness and hesitation about intruding on the closely-knit little family group she had left;

so she welcomed a pretext for delaying her return, though she did not believe her sister-in-law would tell her in a personal letter anything she had not already gleaned from Zoe's published writings. Zoe had had a glorious and triumphant year in South America. She had never disclosed how much she had seen of Giles Arnold while she was there, but Helen gathered it was a good deal, first and last. She had been to every country on the continent, some of them, like Peru, more than once, and had included all sorts of out-of-the-way places on her itinerary. She had perfected her Spanish, followed political and economic trends, and done increasingly brilliant writing all the time. Contrary to Bob's prediction, the news bureau had received the first fruits of her labours, and the syndicated material was now published under two titles—"Capital Kaleidoscope" three times a week and "World Kaleidoscope" on the alternate days. It was only when the bureau was supplied with as much as it could possibly use, that Zoe tried her hand at other writing; but everything she had produced in the course of her trip, beginning with "The Imprisoned Water Spirit," had been quickly snapped up, and she had received some very flattering offers to inaugurate radio programs and undertake extensive lecture tours. She had turned these down, because she still had no definite plans for coming home. She had taken a slow Spanish boat that made innumerable and delightful stops as it ploughed its way along between La Guayra and Barcelona. She was sorry she had not reached Europe in time to see the German reoccupation of the Rhineland, her nose for news must be losing some of its sharpness or she would have sniffed this from afar. On the other hand, she had fulfilled a dream of long standing in going to see Ronnie's own country of Corsica, which had come up to her every expectation. Then she had woven a leisurely zigzag course up to France, and in a sudden burst of speed, flown across the Channel, "to see a few good shows and hear English spoken again." Apparently she had done a good deal more than that. She was very much *persona grata* at the Embassy, and the Ambassador had suggested that she might like to be presented at Court; she had never thought of such a thing, in connection with herself, but she had rather enjoyed it after all. She has seen something of English country life, too. Lord and Lady Grenville had invited her to Star Hundred, and that also she had found enjoyable, in a different way. They said their son would probably be transferred from his Mexican post that year, though where he would be sent next they did not know; naturally they would be very pleased if it might be Washington, and Zoe thought some other persons might be pleased, too. She had renewed acquaintance with the King, whom she had known slightly as Prince of Wales. He had been very kind to her, inviting her informally to lunch at the Palace, and arranging to have her go and see the *Queen Mary*—which in some ways was an even more

imposing ship than the *Normandie*—at Southampton prior to her maiden trip. Zoe had also met him at a cocktail party given by Mrs. Simpson, which she had thought delightful—a charming hostess, distinguished guests, the wittiest conversation and most sophisticated atmosphere imaginable. This party had clearly been the highlight of her stay in London—though she had scored a triumph in securing an exclusive interview with Blum.

Now she was back in France, and finding it something of a let-down. There had been a strike at the hotel where she had first gone in Paris, and at so many others that she had experienced some difficulty in finding a place to stay where she could get either room service or elevator service. In fact, the city was riddled with strikes: All the *grands magasins* were closed, and the employees were sleeping on the premises, threatening to do violence to owners and public alike if either tried to force their way in. She had been obliged to do all her shopping at small establishments, close to where she was staying, because there was a taxi strike, too; and she heard that the worst strike of all was at St. Nazaire, where the shipyards were completely paralyzed, if not actually closed. She thought she might go down there, provided she could get off—a railroad strike was going on, too. If conditions in St. Nazaire were as bad as reported, they had the makings of a pretty timely piece; but she was getting rather fed up with strikes, as a general proposition, especially since they had cramped her own style so much. What she would really like would be to get off to Normandy and stay at one of the little old inns she loved so much—the Auberge du Vieux Puits at Pont Audemer, for instance, where Flaubert had written most of “*Madame Bovary*,” and where the trout and mushrooms and the soufflés were better than anywhere else in the world, which was even more to the point. Speaking of Normandy, had Helen ever thought of adding sparkling cider and apple brandy to the by-products at Hunter’s Green? If not, a word to the wise was probably sufficient. Zoe was sure Helen must remember the frothy *cidre mousseux* and the fiery Calvados they had sipped together from one end to the other of the Conqueror’s country—

It was not only the strikes that were annoying her, and making her feel she would like to get off, Zoe went on to write. Paris was certainly “seeing red” in a big way. She had been to a Communistic play at the Alhambra, a most remarkable piece of propaganda. The theatre was packed, mostly with very quiet, respectable-looking people, who had risen with clenched fists to sing the “*Marseillaise*” at the end of the show, and who after that had sung the “*Internationale*” twice. She had also seen the Communistic parade, two hundred thousand strong, from the apartment where Connie and Ted—who at least were still unchanged and who had again been her good angels—were living now, on the rue du Car-

dinal Lemoine, diagonally opposite where Giles used to live on the Quai d'Orsay—perhaps Helen would remember the place. On the other hand, Zoe had seen the Croix de Feu parade, equally impressive, with de la Rocque at its head and every imaginable organization following after him in full force, on Jeanne d'Arc Day, from the little hotel on the Rue de Rivoli where she had finally taken refuge, because it was so small and unimportant that it had been skipped by the strikers. The *patron*, who was also the *maître d'hôtel*, had become very confidential with her, and had shown her the concealed pin, with the emblem of the skull and crossbones, which he wore as a member of the Croix de Feu; as he did so, he had whispered portentously in her ear, "*C'est l'avenir, Madame; c'est l'avenir!*" Personally she was so confused by this transfigured, seething city, with hardly an aspect left of those she had loved and left seven years before, that she could form no idea of what the future held for it. Did Helen have any theories herself on the subject? Probably not, because she was too far removed from its turmoil, in her peaceful retreat at Hunter's Green. Incidentally, was she going to stay there forever, after all? If not, Zoe would be delighted to have her company at any time. Just because Zoe and Bob had come to the parting of the ways, that must never make any difference between Zoe and Helen—

Helen put Zoe's letter back in its envelope and slowly took off her dress and slip. The sparkling cider was a fine idea, she thought, perhaps the apple brandy, too; anyway, she would bring up the subject the next time she had a good chance when she was talking to Veronique and Welby. She could not bring herself to feel much concern over the fate of France, or even to believe that a few strikes and a few parades indicated that there was really any radical change there. But she was very much concerned about Zoe. This was the first time Zoe had actually used the phrase "parting of the ways" or anything corresponding to it. She wondered what it might portend. Bob would never say anything to her on the rare occasions when she saw him, except that Zoe's pieces got better and better all the time, and that he was glad she was living the kind of life she wanted to lead, which was exactly what he was doing. Helen thought that perhaps she herself might do worse than get on the *Normandie*—or maybe the *Queen Mary*—and go to Europe for the mere purpose of trying to draw Zoe out. She played with the idea as she wriggled into her bathing suit, and little as she was prone to dwell on the perquisites of her wealth, she thought it would be rather fun to engage a suite for herself ten times as enormous and elaborate as the one she had shared with Isabel on the *Leviathan* through the latter's largesse, and spread herself all over it. Poor Isabel! She could not make generous gestures for fine effect any more. Helen still saw a good deal of her, for the French Ambassador had become one of the most regular patrons

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of Hunter's Green, and usually he brought both his daughter and his secretary with him when he came for week-end visits. At first Helen had felt a slight embarrassment about presenting bills for Isabel to pay on his behalf; but she had got over all that. It was surprising how many things she had got over. But she was better pleased when the young de Blonvilles accompanied the Ambassador than when he brought Isabel and Mademoiselle Pauline. Helen liked the young de Blonvilles very much and was more at ease with them than with either the spinster or the secretary. It was more natural for her to think of Isabel as the Ambassador's secretary now than as her own friend. She wondered how many of Isabel's former intimates felt the same way——

It would be nice to go back to Star Hundred while she was about it, if she went to Europe anyway, Helen decided, fastening the strap to her rubber bathing cap. She had always meant to do that some time, since she had a standing invitation, to see if the calm little lake and the rustic summer-house looked the same as she remembered them. But, most of all, it would mean a great deal to her to be with Zoe again. She still loved Zoe dearly; her feelings about her sister-in-law had not changed in the same way as her feelings about Isabel. She had not been happy with Isabel in Europe even at the beginning; she had sensed that something was wrong, even though she did not guess what it was, which had been very stupid of her, now that she looked back on it. But she had adored junketing around with Zoe, and had indeed always been very happy with her, except for that one brief period in Alexandria. And probably, she admitted to herself, she could not have been happy with anyone then. It was too soon after she had lost Alfredo——

She stepped into straw sandals, flung a cellophane cape over her shoulders, and walked slowly across the lawn, through the garden, and down the tiers of terraces. When she reached the first pool she hesitated; it might be rather sweet to sit there for a few minutes, running her fingers through the cool water underneath the fragrant lilies, as she had done when Alfredo first raised her hands to his lips and kissed them. But she had not yet reached the point where she could sit there alone in tranquillity; too many memories still came crowding in around her when she tried to do so. She passed resolutely on, conscious of the sounds that were rising to meet her, the shouts of laughter, the splashing of water. When she stopped again, it was to look down, long and steadily, at the turquoise-coloured pool which she had built, with the ivy-crowned jars rising at each corner of it, and the green grass sloping away toward the luxuriant orchards and the fertile meadows.

Uncle Tam was standing at one end of it, his faithful eyes following every motion of the figures moving about him. Doctor Foster was sitting at the other end, his feet dangling over the edge, his

hands grasping this lightly, but his eyes watchful and attentive, like the old servant's. Ronnie and Welby and Bennie were all in the pool, and Welby was moving across it with slow steady strokes. As he moved he called out to his little son:

"Stop paddling, Bennie! Don't act like a baby! Paddling was all right when you were just playing with Mummy, but you're too big a boy to paddle any longer. If you're coming into the pool with me, you've got to *swim*!"

CHAPTER XXVII

EVERY day, all summer, Welby Hunter went in swimming with his son. When autumn closed in they were both brown and hard and hearty. Sometimes Veronique went swimming with them. Sometimes she merely sat by the edge of the pool, looking at the two bronzed, active figures, the big one and the little one, with love in her eyes. Sometimes she was not there at all in the flesh. She was busy on the farm or in the house. But Helen knew that wherever she was and whatever she was doing, there was only one thought in her mind, and her own problems became increasingly complicated in the light of those rapidly being solved at Hunter's Green.

She had already tentatively suggested, several times, that perhaps when winter came she had better begin to think of going away; but Ronnie and Welby had both protested against any such plan so vigorously and, as she could see, so sincerely that she had put it off again indefinitely. Eventually Welby found an opportunity of talking to her privately and seriously. Of course they didn't want to be selfish, he said; of course she must map out a life of her own again sometime, and meanwhile she really ought to get off for a few days now and then. But he couldn't help hoping that she'd stay with Ronnie and himself most of the time for the present, and be contented to make her headquarters with them, or near them, indefinitely. She must have noticed how much better Ronnie was looking now that she wasn't working like a galley slave any more. If she took over singlehanded the management of the servants and the supervision of the paying guests, of which Helen so largely relieved her; she would go straight downhill again. As far as he was concerned, he needed Helen too; he did not know what on earth he would do without his assistant accountant and his assistant school teacher. Before long, perhaps, Bennie could be sent to school; but that would mean getting him back and forth from Winchester every day, and, besides, it would not take care of the Spanish which he was now chattering like a magpie. It would be a shame to have him lose that when he'd made such a good start. And there were "Susie's Sweets," which were doing better and better all the time, and the sparkling cider, which was just about to pop, if she would pardon a bad pun——

"I've thought of all that, Welby. But, just the same, I don't want to develop into the stereotyped maiden aunt, who has her uses, but who's still a little superfluous in the intimate life of a happy young couple."

"Maiden aunt! Why, you were married five years!"

"Yes, of course. I was only speaking figuratively. You know well

enough what I mean, Welby, even though you pretend that you don't."

"But, Helen, you're not superfluous in our life. You're almost essential to it."

"Practically or personally?"

"Both. I'm telling you the truth, my dear. You know I wouldn't lie to you about a thing like that."

Helen met his steady look directly. For a moment she did not answer. Then she spoke with a simplicity which gave great beauty to her words.

"Welby, please don't misunderstand what I'm going to say. Please don't be angry with me for saying it. I'm not doing it to betray a confidence or to interfere. I'm doing it, although it's hard, because I think it may help."

"No one would ever imagine that you would interfere or betray a confidence, Helen. And no sane man could ever be angry with you. You're the sort that soothes, not the sort that enrages."

He smiled so engagingly that he gave her courage. She went on more bravely.

"It's like this—— Veronique told me once that she'd had to live for years with the consciousness that she'd never had a normal engagement or a happy honeymoon because she'd been such a fool."

"It wasn't because she was a fool. It was because I was a drunken, sensuous brute. What kind of a consciousness do you suppose I've had to live with all these years?"

"Please, Welby! You promised not to be angry—— You know I'm not blaming you or judging either of you. And Veronique went on to say that you were so sorry for what had happened and so sweet to her that you would have made up to her for the way things began if she would only have let you. But she said, too, that if a girl started out like that, she never knew what it was like to feel like a man's betrothed or his bride."

Welby looked away. He no longer tried to meet Helen's direct gaze.

"I think she's beginning to feel that way after all, Welby—as if she were betrothed, as if she might be a bride. I think she'd be happier alone with you while she feels that way than in having anyone else with her, even someone very useful to her and very dear to her. Every girl wants to be alone with her betrothed and her bridegroom."

An expression of sadness, such as Helen had seldom seen there, came into Welby's face. Helen feared that she had said too much, that she had hurt him even more than she had known she might; but when he turned back to her there was no resentment in his look, only a great gentleness and a great comprehension.

"Thank you for telling me, Helen," he said slowly. "I know it wasn't easy for you to do. I've always thought of Veronique as my

wife, and that's meant so much to me that I'm afraid I forgot she'd have wanted to feel like my betrothed or my bride. I do understand now. But I must do a little thinking, in the light of what you've told me, and see if I can decide what really would be best. Primarily for Ronnie, of course. But for the rest of us, too."

Helen did not interrupt the brown study into which she could see he had sunk. They were sitting in the gun-room, with their account books between them. It was their regular hour for work and no one disturbed them. Eventually Welby began to scribble and sketch on one of the sheets of rough paper that lay before him, and finally he held up his scribbings and sketches for Helen to see.

"Why don't you take over the old school-house for yourself?" he asked. "Or the old office, whichever you prefer? They're identical, except for exposure. You could put a small addition on whichever one you choose, so that besides a big living-room downstairs and two dormer bedrooms upstairs, you could have a pullman kitchen and a porch and a servant's room. Opal and Zally could stay there with you, and you'd have a place to put a guest of your own besides. Perhaps Bob would come down more often if he knew you and he could be off by yourselves like that. I'm a good deal worried about Bob. I'm afraid he's in a bad way— Well, we'll talk about that some other time. We could put a corresponding addition on the building you didn't choose and rent it. In that way we wouldn't lose any revenue. I think the budget would bear the cost of remodelling. Or I'm perfectly willing to let you shoulder it all yourself if that would make you any happier."

"It would make me happier. But the whole plan would make me happy. If I had a little house like that, and could go and come between it and the big one, as I thought best—why, then I wouldn't feel in your way. Bennie could have his lessons there—you and I could even do the accounts there. And, later on, if I wanted to take a trip after all, I could just shut the door after me and go—or you could use it to rent again. I'm worried about Bob, too, Welby. But I'm just as much worried about Zoe. I think I'll go to Europe and see her, if she won't come home."

Welby nodded, picking up his pencil and paper again. "All right, later on," he said; "in the spring, say, after the hunting's over, or in the summer, when it begins to get hot. I hope you'll hunt this year, Helen. I didn't like to urge you last year, because I knew you felt you couldn't very well follow the hounds and then avoid the hunt breakfasts and the hunt balls. But you'll be getting into colours pretty soon now, won't you? And going out more? Not that you haven't looked pretty as a picture all this time. I'll never forget the first sight of you when you drove down wearing that tight-fitting little black bonnet, with one white band over your forehead and another under your chin—you might have stepped straight out of a Victorian painting, if you hadn't tucked the veil

into the back of your belt to keep it from blowing around! But you looked even lovelier when you went into white that summer, and all the misty greys and violets you've worn since have been enchanting, too. Now I'd like to see you in a midnight blue habit, though, and a sapphire blue cardigan and a turquoise ball dress."

"Why, Welby, I had no idea you thought so much about clothes! You'd better preach to Veronique. How about seeing her in a bottle-green habit and a crimson cardigan and an old rose ball gown?"

"A crimson cardigan! An old rose ball gown! To wear when all the men will have on their pink coats and evening scarlet? Dear, dear, what a savage you are still! Haven't you learned anything at all about the hunt country in all this time, Helen? Now, a cream-coloured cardigan and an old gold ball gown would be more like it. And the bottle-green habit would be fine. Of course she ought to have all those things, and maybe she will pretty soon. There wasn't anything the matter with Ronnie's clothes before she was married—she was the best-dressed *débutante* of her year. But she had to give up pretty dresses along with almost everything else that was lovely, so she pretended she didn't care about clothes, just as she pretended that about everything else. But let's get back to you. Don't you think you could do what I said?"

"I can go to town and shop, if that will satisfy you. I might even buy some coloured clothes. I won't promise to put them on until I see how I feel in them. But I'll promise to get them."

"I'm very glad. Because Dabney wants to do some entertaining this year when Guy comes on. He told me to ask you if you'd act as hostess for him. It would please me a lot if you felt you could. It's a long time since he's opened up Sycamore Forest to any extent. Of course, the first meet of the season always takes place there, and he does the honours for that in fine style; his cook makes the best Brunswick stew in Clarke County. His Sunday morning punch parties are all right, too. There's no use talking; drinking milk punch for a couple of hours before lunch is a very restful way of spending Sunday morning after a tall Saturday night."

"I shouldn't think after you'd drunk milk punch for two hours you'd have room for any lunch."

"Oh yes, you have, when they're as good as the ones Dabney serves. But he doesn't do as well by the dancing as he does by the food and drink. He ought to have a couple of fiddlers as well as an accordion player for the hunt breakfasts, and more Saturday evening dances. See what you can do to pep him up a little, Helen. Sycamore Forest is a fine old place, finer in lots of ways than Hunter's Green; but it's grown fusty and musty and dusty, with only a bachelor living there all these years. You'd be doing a big service to the county, as well as to Dabney, if you'd help him out."

"Why, of course I'd be glad to help Dabney out! Why didn't

you tell me he wanted me to, in the first place, instead of just talking about coloured clothes? I'll tell him to count on me the next time I see him."

She knew she would not have long to wait, that Dabney would inevitably turn up at Hunter's Green within the next day or two, if he did not actually do so that afternoon. But, as the day wore on, she decided to go to see him. For some unaccountable reason she had a sudden impulse to ride instead of driving her car. So she sought out Ronnie and asked if there were a horse on the place which could be trusted to amble quietly along under the guidance of a rider who was badly out of practice.

"I reckon I'd better give you Bennie's first pony. She's so old and staid now that she wouldn't shy if you set a firecracker off underneath her. Do you want anyone to go with you—wherever it is you're going?"

"No. I like to ride alone, just as I like to drive alone. I'm going to Sycamore Forest. Welby says Dabney wants me to help him entertain this year when the hunting season opens. So I'm going to talk to him about it. I want to find out exactly what he expects me to do."

"A very good idea. I'll look for you when I see you. Maybe Dabney'll come back to supper with you. Or maybe he'll keep you over there. I'll take care of the tourists if any come this afternoon."

Helen had not been on a horse since she had ridden with Alfredo in Mexico, when he and she went out regularly with the *Charros* and *Chinas* on Sunday mornings. Now, in her outmoded and outgrown habit, she felt a little strange and awkward at first. She had always ridden sidesaddle, and since there were still a few women who clung to this style, even in the hunt country, she saw no reason for abandoning it. But she must certainly get something shorter and smarter, nipped in a little more at the waist, less constricting over the breast. She laughed a little at the memory of the first time she had seen Veronique's picture in a Sunday supplement, when she had been proud because her own figure was so much flatter and therefore so much more fashionable. Feminine curves were certainly coming into their own again very fast. She was pleased to think that though there was no question who had the more alluring form, her own was not without its attractions. And Welby's idea about a midnight blue habit really had merit. She would see what could be done about carrying it out—

The pony ambled along peacefully, giving her no trouble. She let her reins go slack, and looked lovingly over the beautiful countryside which surrounded her. She had grown very fond of it, and in the richness of its autumn colouring it had taken on a magnificence that was stirring to her senses. The apple-trees were laden with crimson fruit, the maples were golden, the oaks were beginning to bronze; the sun was almost as warm as it had been in summer, and

a soft haze hung over the hills. As she passed Aurora she caught sight of Doctor Foster, cantering down his driveway, and stopped to speak to him. He expressed his gratified surprise at seeing her on horseback, and asked if he might have the pleasure of escorting her somewhere. His patients all seemed to be leaving him in peace for once, he said, and he had a fine free afternoon on his hands. Helen gave him a responsive smile, but she shook her head, telling him, as she had told Ronnie, that she really liked to ride alone, and adding, with a glance at his superb mount, that she would be unable to keep up with his pace and that she would cramp his style.

"You can give me a standing invitation, though," she ended. "I'm going to get back into harness—or, rather, into the saddle—right away now. In a few weeks I'll be in better form, and then I'd love to go riding with you. I'm even thinking of hunting, though I've never done that. But I'm on my way to talk it over with Dabney now."

The doctor let her go, unquestioningly, as Veronique had done, and when she reached Sycamore Forest, Dabney Turberville expressed no surprise at the sight of her. He made her extremely welcome, leading her past the shadowy drawing-room, which gave signs of long disuse, into the disorderly but cheerful study, where rows of silver cups surmounted the mantel and five dogs were stretched out in lazy ease before the fire. Without suggesting a highball, he ordered tea for her, and this was ceremoniously brought in, hot and fragrant, and flanked by biscuits dripping with jam and butter; then he listened, attentively and responsively, to the explanation of why she had come.

"Welby and I had a rather confidential talk this morning, Dabney. I've been thinking for some time that perhaps I wouldn't be needed at Hunter's Green much longer."

"I've been thinking the same thing myself. Is it great minds that run in the same channels?"

"I don't know. Of course I haven't a great mind and I've never worried for fear you might have. Do you?" They laughed together, understandingly, at the simple jest, and she went on, "Welby said I was mistaken. He said I was needed and wanted both. So I'm going to stay—through the winter anyway. Only not in the big house any longer. We're going to remodel the school-house." She produced Welby's sketches and scribbles, which she had brought with her in her pocket. "Do you think that's a good idea?"

"Excellent. As Welby pointed out, you can have company of your own quite independently, whenever you feel like it. I'll pass the good news on to Guy the next time I write. I'm sure he'll be delighted with the arrangement."

"Yes. We didn't have much chance to be alone last fall. Not that we needed much. I don't know whether Guy told you—he proposed to me the day after he got here."

"No, he didn't tell me."

"He said of course he knew it was too soon. But that the time before, when he came here on purpose to propose, he had been too late. So he decided not to make that same mistake again. He said almost anything might happen during a long, dull, dreary winter, that I might even get interested in you."

"Helen, you're incomparable. Do you ever run true to form?"

"My sister-in-law asked me the same thing once. But I don't know what either of you means."

"Only that you never do and say what your type is traditionally supposed to do and say. Since you've told me this much, would it be indiscreet to inquire how much encouragement you gave poor Grenville?"

"I didn't give him a great deal but I was careful not to discourage him either. I said I supposed that some day, when I felt better, it would be natural for me to think of getting married again, and that I had already made up my mind when I did I would marry an only child. I knew I never could face seven brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law again. I said I would prefer to have my husband an orphan, too, and, of course, in that way, you would be even better than Guy. But, after all, I like Lady Grenville very much, so probably I should like Lord Grenville, too. And I certainly like Guy."

"Yes, I gathered that. But you're not in love with him, are you?"

"No. But I thought this time I might see how it would work out to like someone before I fell in love with him. Because, before, I fell in love at first sight. And though that happened to be all right, as far as Alfredo and I were concerned, my—a friend of mine said to me, not long ago, that of course she was in love with her husband, but she wasn't sure that she liked him. Since then they've separated, and it's all been very sad. So you see——"

"I see that you're a very deceptive young lady. You look like a Dresden china shepherdess, and you're actually a profound student of human nature."

"No, I'm not. But I do think when Guy gets here this year it would be just as well if I were more or less prepared to say something to him, definite, don't you? And if I had a place to say it in?"

Dabney agreed, gravely, that it would, and from that point they went on to discuss her possible usefulness to him. Remembering Welby's advice, she embarked at once on the subject of music. That was an important consideration, Dabney told her, and one which it would take a long time to talk over; she had better make up her mind to dine with him; then he would ride home with her. It would do no good to tell him, as she had told Ronnie and Doctor Foster, that she liked to ride alone; she might find out she liked to ride with him, and however that might be, he was sure he would like to ride with her, and he was a very self-willed man. Besides, if

she were going to join his hunt, he must find out how good a horse-woman she was.

It was late when Helen and Dabney started to ride back along the river together, and in view of the pony's gait, and other complications, very much later before they finally reached Hunter's Green. Dabney said he would use his own key, which he had not forgotten this time, to unlock the stable, so that he could put the pony away, and he would reassure the night watchman, who would probably shoot at sight unless duly warned that the trespassers on the premises were harmless. Then he would come in, if Helen felt in the mood for offering him a nightcap. Welby and Ronnie had already gone upstairs, so, for another hour, the pleasant *tête-à-tête* which had begun at mid-afternoon continued, while Dabney fingered his glass and Helen gazed contentedly into the fire. When at last he rose he looked down at her quizzically.

"What would you say to me," he inquired, "if I told you I'd feel the evening had a perfect ending if you'd let me kiss you good-night?"

"I don't know. That's another thing I'd have to think over."

"You'd better think quickly, then. Because, if you don't, I'm quite likely to interrupt your thoughts abruptly by simply doing it."

In spite of his bantering tone, he did not hurry her. After a moment he asked her a second question, a more serious one.

"You don't feel it would be disloyal to the memory of Alfredo if you let another man kiss you now, do you, Helen?"

"No. I don't feel anything I could do now would be disloyal to the memory of Alfredo, unless it were disgraceful. It wouldn't be disgraceful to let you kiss me."

"And you don't think it would jeopardize Guy's chances for the future?"

"No. I don't think that either. I think if his chances could be jeopardized by a mere kiss, they couldn't amount to much, anyway."

"Well, then——"

She raised her lips, and felt his face against hers and his arms folded around her. It lasted for only a minute. Then he was gone, and she was alone again, shaken and surprised.

She banked the fire carefully and went slowly upstairs to her own room. Then she stood irresolutely for a minute in front of the huge old-fashioned press where she kept her clothes before she took from this a small tin safe and unlocked it. Her own jewels, which Alfredo had given her, were in the safe, and she removed them from their velvet-lined boxes, one by one, and looked at them. Finally, she lifted a last box, larger than any of the others, and opened that. Out of it she took the Borghese necklace.

She was still running it through her fingers, marvelling at the

way the green fire of its stones caught the firelight, when there was a gentle knock at the door. She said, "Come in!" without laying the necklace aside. She wanted Ronnie to see it in her hands.

"I gather you had a satisfactory conference," Ronnie remarked pleasantly, but a little drily. "There must have been lots of details to settle, though. I hope Dabney didn't wear you out, staying so late, when you must have been stiff after your first ride."

"No, he didn't wear me out. I had a nice talk with him. He's going to see about getting the music Welby thinks he ought to have, and he's promised to give a series of Saturday night dances at Sycamore Forest. I had a nice time with him as well as a nice talk. I'm growing very fond of him."

"Well, that will make things pleasant for him and you, too—— Good heavens, Helen, what have you got in your hands?"

"I was going to tell you, Ronnie, as soon as you stopped asking questions about Dabney. It's your necklace."

"My necklace!"

"Yes. I bought it back from Mrs. Crowder, quite a while ago. You know her husband was defeated, the last time he ran for Congress, and I heard he'd lost a lot of money besides. I corresponded with her about the necklace before I left Mexico. I got it, too. I bought it with my own money. Alfredo didn't give it to me, except indirectly. I never meant to keep it. I always meant to give it back to you sometime."

"But Helen, I couldn't let you do such a thing! That necklace is worth——"

"I know what it's worth. I paid for it. And, of course, you're going to let me give it back to you. That's what I bought it for, I tell you. Only you must promise me you won't sell it again. I don't suppose you'll ever feel you would need to, now that everything's straightening out so well for you. But even if you should feel that way, you mustn't do it. Because it's not just an heirloom any more, it's a present, too. A present to show you how much I love you. A present to show that I'm glad you're happy and that I'm happy, too. A wedding present."

"*A wedding present!*"

"Yes. Don't ask any more questions tonight, please, Ronnie. I am tired. I don't feel like talking. Let me put the necklace on for you, and don't take it off again until you've shown it to Welby. Tell him what I said about it. Good night, Ronnie dear."

Welby was in bed, lying comfortably relaxed among his pillows. He had heard Dabney and Helen when they came in, and later he had heard Dabney leave, without fully waking from his pleasant drowsiness. But when he felt Veronique slip out of bed he was instantly alert. As she came back into the room he switched on the light.

"Nothing's the matter, is there, Ronnie? With Bennie? Or with Helen? Good God! What's that you've got on?"

"Nothing's the matter with anybody. I don't believe you've ever seen this necklace before, Welby. I'll tell you about it."

She sat down on the edge of the bed, still wearing the necklace, and told him its history. He had not previously known of its existence or of its sale. Now he learned of these at the same time that he learned of its recovery.

"Helen said I must never sell it again."

"*Sell it again!* You had no business to sell it in the first place. I wonder how you can sit there and look me in the face, confessing you did such a thing."

"Oh, Welby, you know why I sold it! You know that you and Bennie and Hunter's Green mean more to me than all the necklaces in the world!"

"Yes, darling, I know we do. But that's not the point. The point is that this necklace has significance, as well as beauty and value. That's why you must keep it, whatever happens. The way Althea kept her bracelet."

"That's what Helen said. At least, she didn't speak of Althea, but she said the necklace had meaning. She said it wasn't just an heirloom any more. She said it was a present, too. A wedding present."

"A wedding present!"

"That what she said. I repeated it, just the way you did now, and she said she couldn't explain, that she was tired, that she didn't want to answer questions tonight. But she said she was very happy herself, and that she was glad I was happy, too. She said she wanted you to see the necklace. Welby—you don't suppose Dabney's persuaded her to marry him, do you?"

Welby lay still, looking at her reflectively for a minute. "No," he said at last, "I don't think he's done that exactly. But he's probably said something—or done something—that has persuaded her she ought not to drift along, the way she has been doing, much longer. I don't believe it was very hard. I think she was in a mood to be persuaded." He raised his hands and unfastened the necklace, putting it down on the bedside table, where it lay in a glittering pile of green and gold. "She's been thinking a lot about us too, lately," he said, "very kindly, very fondly. I think it pleased her to send you in to me, adorned with something beautiful and precious and symbolic. It pleases me that she wanted to, and that you've got this treasure back. But you don't need a necklace, Ronnie, to make me feel you have the most beautiful neck in the world. I've known that always."

He drew her to him, burying his face in her white breast, and it was a long time before he lifted his head. "I think Helen had a double meaning when she talked about a wedding

present," he said at last. "Are you in a mood to be persuaded, too, Ronnie?"

"A mood——"

"Yes. Aren't you coming back to bed? It's getting awfully late. And I missed you while you were gone."

She lay down beside him and he reached for her hand, which was already outstretched for him to take. Then he repeated the ritual he had been through hundreds of times before.

"Ronnie, it's so inadequate to thank you for standing by."

"It isn't inadequate the way you say it. I love to hear you. Not that I think I deserve it."

"You still want me, don't you, Ronnie?"

"You know how much."

"But you're not tired of waiting for me, are you, darling?"

"No, I'll never get tired of waiting for you."

"And it hasn't been too hard?"

"No, it's never been too hard."

"Because you've always known the time would finally come——"

Suddenly they were both very still, hushed as if by the imminence of some revelation. Then Welby began to turn, slowly, but naturally, like a man unhampered by physical handicaps, and took Veronique in his arms. There was no element of wonder or hesitation in the act, as he gathered her to him. He moved with the joyous confidence of the expected lover, secure in his own strength, and in the knowledge that his beloved had long and eagerly prepared for his coming. The rapture with which she received him was like a strong stream, flowing freely to encompass them both, in the same overwhelming way that she herself was encompassed and overwhelmed by his embrace.

PART VIII

CHAPTER XXVIII

JETT DABNEY and Stewart Bainbridge, who both had good memories and gave no one a chance to forget this, insisently expatiated, all through the autumn, on the fact that there had not been so brilliant and satisfying a season since 1905. That was the year when the Board of Governors of the Middleburg Hunt had invited Mr. A. Henry Higginson of Massachusetts to bring the Middlesex Fox Hounds to Virginia, and the famous match between English and American hounds had taken place. Dabney Turberville never interrupted his elderly cousins in the midst of their reminiscences; but occasionally he told them, with characteristic whimsicality, that he hoped when Bennie became the local M.F.H., along about 1970, they would be prepared to tell tall tales and sing gay songs about the season of '36-'37.

Jett and Stewart jovially promised to do this; and meanwhile everyone was agreed that there had never been such fine breezy hunting weather; that there had never been so many fast straight runs; and that there had never been such rollicking hunt breakfasts and such sparkling hunt balls. The progress which Dabney and Helen had jointly evolved, and which they were aided in working out by the Hunt Committee—not to mention the climatic conditions and the surprising way in which both foxes and hounds seemed disposed to oblige them—was a startling success from beginning to end. But it reached its culmination in the barn dance which embodied their most brilliant idea.

There was an old stone stable at Sycamore Forest, with four sturdy stone pillars supporting the overhanging roof which formed the portico, and for a long time Dabney had dreamt about using this stable as one side of an open rectangle, with fine modern stalls built all around an open court. However, it was not until the first day that Helen rode over to dine with him that he pulled out the drawings which years before he had thrust into a pigeonhole in an overstuffed desk. Watching the expression on her face as he spread the plans out in front of her and explained his half-abandoned project, he decided to put it into effect without an instant's delay. The speed with which the stable was constructed established a record in Clarke County; so did the barn dance with which it was opened. Champagne was served in every stall, and dancing, which began immediately after the lavish dinner in Dabney's huge resplendent

dining-room, was still in full swing by broad daylight. Helen stopped, momentarily, by Welby's easy-chair about midnight; he was going everywhere now, and the fact that he did not dance was not even noticeable, because there were always a few persons who would rather play bridge than do anything else, anywhere; since his bridge was superlatively good, he was in great demand when tables were being made up. She waited until he had finished scoring, and then asked him slyly if the music were all right this time. When he assured her, with an answering laugh, that it was, she floated away again and he did not see her any more until the next afternoon. Then she came into the gun-room, with no apologies for her tardy appearance, and shoved away the account books which were spread out before him.

"Don't let's do sums today, Welby," she said. "Let's talk."

"All right. What shall we talk about?"

"Why, the party, of course. What's the good of going to a party if you can't talk about it afterwards?"

"Haven't you had a chance to talk to anyone about the party yet, you poor neglected girl?"

"No. I was asleep all the morning. And you and Ronnie came home so early."

"It was about two," Welby remarked, lighting a cigarette and settling a little further back on the sofa. He was managing with a cane very well now; there were no crutches and no wheelchair in evidence, and the braces he still wore on his feet did not show. He looked, as he felt, completely at ease, receptive to intimate converse, and faintly amused.

"Oh well! You're not going to argue with me by any chance, are you, Welby?"

"No. But I'm going to defend both Ronnie and myself from unjust attack. If you wanted to talk to us about the party in the wee small hours, you should have come home when we did, instead of six or seven hours later, with Guy."

"How do you know what time I came home, and with whom?"

"I was just getting up to go to work."

"Oh Welby, you couldn't have been!"

"But I was. Only the most adroit and sudden shifting of my usual route enabled me to avoid an embarrassing collision."

Helen still flushed easily, and she did so now. But the colour which came into her face gave it a look of warmth rather than a look of discomfiture; and though she changed the subject somewhat abruptly, she did so with no sign of confusion.

"Zoe looked stunning, didn't she?"

"Stunning isn't a strong enough word. How does a dress stay up when it has no straps over the shoulders? I meant to ask Ronnie but I forgot."

"Why, the neckline is boned."

"The *neckline*!"

"Well, the *décolletage* then. Don't be so captious. I thought that tight-fitting, heart-shaped bodice was awfully effective, with such a long full skirt. I don't remember ever seeing Zoe in black before. Her skin looked whiter and her hair redder than ever."

"She certainly gave the effect of coming out of mourning, in a lavish way."

"Welby, I think you're perfectly disgusting. I was surprised to have her turn up, weren't you?"

"Very much. I've got so used to the idea of having her in Europe that somehow it didn't occur to me she'd be back in Washington and casually drop down here."

"I think Bob felt the same way, Welby. I don't think he had the least idea she was coming back. She appeared without the slightest notice. He told me so himself. It really makes things rather awkward for him."

"Awkward?"

"Well, of course, the Alexandria house is still let. And he's living at his club. Won't it look a little queer if he stays on there and Zoe stays on at the Willard?"

"I suppose it will. Can't they get the tenants out of their house or find another one?"

"Oh, probably, in course of time. That is, if they want to. But I'm not sure they do. Of course, I haven't had much chance to talk with either of them——"

"Well, I can understand that, too."

Helen's blush deepened again, becomingly. "As I was trying to tell you," she went on severely, "Zoe did say that she was fed up with France, the strikes and everything. She says the Government is simply riddled with rottenness, that lots of the leaders aren't French at all, in either feeling or origin, and that the Communistic forces are getting stronger and stronger. She got hemmed in by a red riot on the outskirts of Lyons and was in a tight place for a few minutes. Of course, she wriggled out of it all right—you'd know Zoe would—but she was driving a brand new car and it got pretty badly battered. I didn't understand anything she told me very well—I'm afraid I haven't read the news faithfully enough, or followed what I did read very attentively. I'm more troubled about Zoe than I am about France. She says she intends to stay in Washington now, but I don't know how long she'll be satisfied to do it. She seems very restless to me. And I didn't get the idea, either, that Bob was crazy to have her here. You'd think he'd be overjoyed to get her back at last, in one way. On the other hand, he's got used to managing without her now. That is, he's evolved a new sort of routine that doesn't include her."

"Yes, I believe he has."

"And I don't believe he wants it upset. I think he likes it the

way it is. I don't know whether Zoe realizes that yet or not. When she finds it out, I'm afraid it's going to be an awful shock to her."

"Well, I should think it might be. But she's asked for trouble, as far as Bob is concerned, for a long time now. She didn't at first. She tried to be tactful and helpful and she gave up a lot for him. I'm afraid he never was able to forget that she had though. That was partly his own fault, his own make-up rather. But if she could only have made him feel he was the one who was important, that there was nothing he couldn't do, that it was a privilege to be associated with him in any way—a little more like Ronnie's attitude towards me. Naturally I'm not such a fool I don't realize I'm not worthy of tying up Ronnie's shoes. But it's given me a lift all the time to have her act as if I were. And I never could have pretended I thought I was going to get well if I hadn't been trying to meet her own magnificent bluff."

Helen nodded, understandingly. "I know what you mean. And you're right in thinking that Zoe tried at first. She did try. They both tried. And they loved each other dearly. But they weren't as intelligent as Ronnie and you. That sounds like a funny thing to say, because of course they seem a lot more intelligent. But here they are, in this blind alley, and it frightens me. I don't know what to do about it."

"There's one thing you can do. You can stop talking about going to Europe. You can't very well make a point of joining Zoe there when she's back in Washington herself. She'll stay for a while, anyway. It won't be a case of 'off again, on again, gone again, Finnegan.' Whatever Zoe's done to Bob, she's taken a load off my mind and off Ronnie's by coming back just now. Not to mention the load off Dabney's mind. We just couldn't get along without you around here now, Helen."

"I was coming to that in a minute. I think you'll have to. You don't need me really any more. I'm just a habit to you and Ronnie and I'm getting to be a habit with Dabney a lot too fast. I'll stay until the hunting's over, because I promised. But in the spring, since I don't have to join Zoe in Europe, as you say, I think I'll go to Mexico."

"Mexico!"

"Yes. I've been considering it for quite a long while. I think I'll go down there and take a house. And stay through the spring. The summer, too, maybe."

Welby waited, without interrupting her, for her to go on.

"You know I used to be afraid of my mother-in-law," she said. "Well, I want to be able to prove that I'm not afraid of her any longer. To her and to myself both. I believe, if I could do that, I wouldn't ever be afraid of anyone or anything else again. I'm not naturally brave like Zoe; I'm naturally a coward. But Bob used to say that the only time you could put a situation behind you and

know that it would stay put was after you'd licked it. He said then you could do whatever you chose; but if you didn't lick it, then it would keep sneaking up on you again, when you least expected it, and socking you in the eye after all. I wish he'd remember that himself right now. In fact, I tried to remind him, but he just shut me up. I've remembered though. And I think it sounds reasonable. So I'm going to follow it through. I'm going to Mexico to rent one of those Hollywoodish houses I used to despise, with big showy front yards and pseudo-Spanish balconies. I'm going to settle down there for a while, and make myself comfortable, and do some sight-seeing and some studying and some entertaining. I'm going to entertain whoever I please. Not Guy, because he has his transfer at last—he's going to Paris and he's perfectly delighted. But men like Guy. Any number of them. I don't mean I won't do it in a nice way. It will be in a nice way. I'll show Doña Amelia that it can be and should be. But it's going to be done, right under her nose."

Again Welby waited, without impatience, for Helen to go on.

"I won't act defiantly. I'll do the things she thinks I ought to do, too," Helen said. "I mean, like going to Alfredo's tomb. I couldn't have, at first. I couldn't have borne it. And then later, when I could have borne it in one way, I couldn't have in another. It would have seemed almost like a sacrilege to me if I had bowed down before something that had been vital and ecstatic in a place of death. I would have felt like a ghoul if I had gone to Alfredo's grave then, in a long morbid series of macabre pilgrimages. I wanted him to rest in peace; I wanted to achieve peace again myself. I've found it here with you and Ronnie. Now I can go to the tomb. I'm ready and eager to. Because I can go with self-control and self-respect. Paying a tribute to a memory, not trying to prolong a passion."

"I see the way you feel and I like it. I like it a lot. We'll miss you, but you're right. You ought to go. Do you mean to go alone?"

"No—I wondered if you'd let me take Bennie with me."

"Bennie!"

"Yes. It would be wonderful for him. He's never been away from Hunter's Green at all. It's time he did go. You don't want him to grow up thinking it's the only place in the world. And, of course, it would be wonderful for me——"

Welby leaned forward and began to straighten out the papers on the table before him. He still appeared interested and composed, but he looked less relaxed than he had, and his air of amusement had vanished completely. He closed the books with a gesture of finality.

"If we're not going to do any accounts today," he said, "we may as well put these away. Not that it's important one way or another—they're all in very good order. I went over them this morning while you were still asleep. But I thought we started out

to talk about Dabney's party, and somehow we seem to have landed in Mexico instead. Of course I'll have to ask Ronnie about Bennie, Helen. You know that. I'm not sure whether she'd consent to be parted from him. And I'd rather like to ask Bennie himself. I'm all in favour of treating children as if they had minds, as if they had a right to be consulted. When I asked you if you meant to go alone, of course I didn't think about Bennie. You've sprung a surprise on me, the way you love to do. But I did think of someone else. I thought perhaps you might ask Zoe."

Welby's idea seemed to Helen so good that she acted on it fairly promptly. Bob had gone back to Washington immediately after the barn dance. ("At least he came to it though. That's something," Helen, who was still determined not to admit an open break between her brother and sister-in-law, had said to Guy Grenville, and Guy, grasping her meaning instantly, had gravely agreed that it was.) But Zoe had consented to stay on for a few days, and as she seemed to find time hanging rather heavily on her hands, Helen had plenty of chances to talk with her, though Zoe had also spent some hours in the gun-room with Welby and really had gone over accounts. She had found these in such excellent condition, however, that she had not made any suggestions, except to say that in all fairness she must insist that he and Ronnie should take over a larger share of the revenue derived from their partnership. After all, it was more than a year and a half since she had so much as darkened the door of Hunter's Green, and while she had been ranging freely around the world, the others had done the work and developed the business. Ronnie had always accomplished wonders, all things considered, and now that Welby was taking an increasingly active part in the actual running of the stock farm, its prestige and its profits were both growing by leaps and bounds. She did not think she had a right to more than a fourth of this last year's income.

"You and Bob together? Don't forget he's in on this, too."

"I'm afraid I had forgotten. But he hasn't come down more than once or twice himself, has he, all the time I've been gone? In spite of the fact that Helen's been here all this time and that she simply adores him. I wonder what he does do with himself, for diversion."

"I haven't the least idea," Welby answered with such finality that Zoe gave him a frankly questioning glance. He disregarded it and went on: "Well, you can speak to Bob about it—or I will, just as you prefer. If he doesn't come down again soon, I can write. He and I do correspond fairly frequently. I've never made an important decision yet without consulting him, and I think he appreciates this. If he agreed with you that Ronnie and I have a right to three-fourths of the profits, of course we'll accept them gladly. The sparkling cider's going very well now, not to mention Susie's

Sweets.' I think with the extra money from the stock farm we might begin to cut down substantially on the number of paying guests we take in. I'd like very much to do that. Partly because I want to feel we can have the house to ourselves again and partly because I don't want Ronnie to overwork. She's bound to notice the difference when Helen goes. And she slaved for so many years."

"Does it really bother you to have Ronnie work hard, Welby?"

"Of course it bothers me. It bothers any man who isn't a slacker or a weakling or a fool to have his wife overwork. If he's a cripple, with any kind of a conscience, or any kind of guts, it nearly drives him mad. The old idea that the husband was the head of the house didn't just build up a theory that he had a right to bully his wife and browbeat her. That was only one interpretation of it. The other was that he was the household's mainstay and support, that she depended on him and looked up to him and that he didn't let her down. Also that he protected her and cherished her. The system had its merits as well as its faults. I think women liked it as much as men did. In fact, I think they still do, in the rare cases where they have a chance to find out."

He smiled, so pleasantly that the implication of his words lost most of its sting, and at that moment Ronnie herself opened the door of the room. She was now the whipper-in of the local Hunt, and she had been riding all day. She was still wearing the bottle-green habit which had been discussed as a desirable possibility early in the autumn, and which shortly afterwards had become an actuality. Its cut was perfectly suited to her form, its colour to her complexion. Standing in the doorway, her cheeks glowing from the cold, her eyes bright with excitement, she was the personification of vitality and high spirits.

"Hello, you two!" she said gaily. "What do you mean, staying cooped up in the house on a day like this? You both ought to be outdoors getting some fresh air into your lungs. I suppose you haven't seen anything of Helen? I was looking for her, too—I have a message for her. But she probably won't be back for hours yet. I don't see why she doesn't just move over to Sycamore Forest, bag and baggage—she spends all her spare time there. She was still in the field around sunset, but after that she sort of melted away. She has a habit of doing that, especially since Guy came—I think we had the straightest, fastest run I've ever seen today, Welby—a nine-mile point and about fifteen miles as hounds ran. But it's pitch dark now, and that makes an end of it, worse luck— Well, I'll dash along upstairs and have a shower before the rest of the crowd gets here, unless there's something I can do for either or both of you. I looked in to see whether there was or not."

The door closed, quietly, on her disappearing figure, but the animation which had pervaded the room with her coming still seemed to linger there. Zoe spoke with slight sarcasm.

"She somehow doesn't give the effect of a down-trodden, lash-driven woman, Welby."

"She never did, even when she was working eighteen hours a day. She never would, through some miracle I don't understand. But she isn't working that way any more, thank the Lord. The point is I don't want her to work at all. I want her to ride, as she's been doing today, and come in bringing the fragrance and the feeling of fields and forests with her, the way she did just now. I want her to put on beautiful clothes, and welcome my friends to Hunter's Green in her own royal manner, the way she's getting ready to do this minute. And then, when they're gone, I want her to still have lots of time left to love me in."

"Why, Welby, I didn't know you could talk like that!"

"I didn't know it either. I reckon Ronnie must have taught me. She's taught me a good many things——"

He smiled pleasantly again. Zoe could see that when he thought of the things Ronnie had taught him, this made him very happy.

"May I ask you a question, Welby? It's rather a personal one."

"Sure, anything you like. We're pals, aren't we? What good are pals if you can't be personal with them?"

"Not much. It's just this: you said a little while ago that it bothered you to have Ronnie work hard. How do you feel about having her suffer?"

"Why, I hate the very thought of it like hell, of course. I don't get you."

"Then you hope she won't ever have another child?"

"No, I hope she'll have a lot more children. She hopes so, too. In fact, since you've asked—I don't believe Ronnie will be riding much longer. She's so well, Doctor Foster didn't see any reason why she shouldn't until she was perfectly sure. But now that she's getting surer every day, she's decided herself that she doesn't want to take any chances. I believe there'll be another child late next summer, Zoe."

"Then she *will* suffer?"

"Oh—that was what you meant? Yes, she will suffer then and I can't save her from it. But Ronnie's very primitive in lots of ways, Zoe. She'll not only surmount that kind of suffering; she'll glory in it. She'd tell you, if you talked to her instead of me, that childbirth is different from any other sort of pain, not only the pain itself, but the principle behind it. Because, going back to what I said before, if a man feels he's spared his wife everything except that, as her protector and supporter and mainstay, somehow he can stand having her take the heavy end that one time. He can bring himself to feel it's her share. It's when he's let her carry the heavy end all the time, and then sees her go through that besides, that it's unendurable for him. Don't you see? When Bennie was born I

could have stood being boiled in oil easier than I stood knowing Ronnie was in labour, because I'd brought nothing but worry and shame and drudgery into her life up to then. But now that I've made her happy—now that I know she loves me better than anyone else in the world—now that we're building a home and a future together—why, it'll be different. It won't be easy, but I'll be able to look on it as a means to an end, as part of the common lot she wants to share, as— Oh, I don't know how to say it! But there it is, just the same."

"I think I'm beginning to understand what you mean, Welby. I'm not sure, but I think so."

"Well, you go on thinking and I'm sure you will. If you don't mind having me get personal too, Zoe, I believe if you'd let Bob pay all the bills and write all the pieces he'd let you have a baby. That's putting it pretty crudely, but that's what it boils down to, in his case and yours. And you'd both be a lot happier— Well, if there's nothing else you wanted to talk over with me I think I'll go upstairs myself. I can run the elevator now, did you know that? See you later."

Since everything was going so well with the partnership there was nothing more to talk over with Welby, as far as the stock farm was concerned, and though her one intimate conversation with him had given her considerable food for thought, it did not incline Zoe to seek him out for more *tête-à-têtes* of a personal nature. She declined to hunt, saying she was so out of practice that she would be a nuisance in the field; and since everyone else she knew, of her own age, was hunting, she could find no one with whom to ride in a desultory fashion except Bennie, who had never shown the same affection for her that he lavished so freely on Helen. Indeed, though the exasperating little boy maintained a stubborn silence under accusation, or muttered that he had not understood, Zoe suspected him of having sneaked away purposely several times without waiting for her, when she had told him plainly she wanted him with her. She did dance, and it was evident that her presence at balls was highly appreciated, quite aside from the sensation caused by her startling Paris clothes; but there was no dancing in the daytime, and she was more apt to be invited out with a large group, after dinner, than with a small one, to dinner itself, as Helen was evidently now invariably invited. It was on one of the occasions when Helen was dining out and her sister-in-law was not, that she sought Zoe out in her room and put the Mexican proposition up to her.

Zoe studied Helen with interest while the exposition went on. There was nothing left to suggest the stricken young widow in Helen's manner and appearance any more. On the other hand, there was a great deal to indicate the independent and self-con-

fidant beauty and heiress. Ronnie's bottle-green habit was not the only costume originating in the imagination which had become an actuality. Helen came into Zoe's room wearing a turquoise blue velvet, patterned after a model of the sixties, and an old-fashioned parure of turquoise and diamonds, which included a tiara, a necklace, pendant earrings and wide bracelets. She had achieved, increasingly, an effect of great elegance and distinction in everything she put on, while still retaining the quaint air which had made her so appealing as a girl. Zoe regarded her with undisguised and ungrudging admiration.

"You certainly have blossomed out, sweetness," she said, with no undertone of satire in her voice. "Where is the dinner tonight? I've forgotten, if I ever heard."

"At Flora Treadway's, in Middleburg. Later on, we're all going to the ball at Tivoli, the Hogans' place. You're going to meet us there, aren't you?"

"Yes, I believe so. Just who do you mean by 'we all'? Besides that tweedy old warhorse?—Gosh! will I ever forget the first time I saw her at the Fort Myer Horse Show?—who else besides you and Flora is in the sacred inner circle just now?"

There was already sarcasm in her voice again, but Helen answered with accustomed gentleness. The names did not mean much to Zoe, and she nodded without asking any more questions. It was then that Helen, spreading her soft turquoise-coloured skirts around her as she sat down, and opening a painted fan with delicate filagree sticks, began to ask questions herself. She was going back to Mexico that spring, she said, outlining her reasons much as she had done in talking to Welby. She would like to take Bennie with her, and Bennie was crazy to go; he and she had already discussed it secretly. But she was not sure Welby and Ronnie would consent to that arrangement. In any case, she would like to have someone of her own age with her. Zoe had often spoken, in a general way, of going back there. Wouldn't this, perhaps, be a good time? Unless, of course—Helen did not know what Zoe's own plans were, or Bob's—possibly they had something else in mind—

Zoe did not interrupt her until she had finished. Indeed, she listened with such quiet attention that Helen instantly knew that she was intrigued by the idea that had been presented to her. But she finally countered by beginning to ask questions herself.

"I think I get you, sweetness, about squaring things off with Doña Amelia and all that. But I sort of gathered—I don't mean to be prying—that you'd found a pretty strong attraction that might keep you right here in Berryville."

"Well, yes, I have found a strong attraction. But when it's just an attraction I think it's a good plan to get away from it for a while, don't you? You have a better perspective on it."

"There's certainly something in what you say. But what about

this other attraction, that isn't indigenous to the countryside but that keeps cropping up here?"

"I don't need perspective on that quite as much as I do time. I don't mind telling you that Guy's asked me to marry him right away and go to Paris with him. But I've told him that one precipitate marriage is enough for any woman. I've explained that if I ever do get married again I'll have to do it at my leisure."

"Really, Helen——"

"Well, that's the way I feel about it. I suppose I'll marry someone someday, but just now I'm enjoying having eligible suitors. No one would ever admit Alfredo was eligible, in spite of the fact that he was so wonderful. But there isn't any argument about Dabney and Guy."

"There certainly isn't. More power to you! Perhaps if you string them along a little, you'll add to the collection and find someone still more dazzling."

"I've thought of that, too. But I've been thinking of something else besides. I'd be a lot happier, Zoe, if I could see you and Bob settled down together again before I got married myself. I'm troubled about you both. Terribly troubled. Welby and Ronnie are, too. So is everyone else who cares about you. If you're really thinking of staying on in Washington now, I won't say another word to you about coming to Mexico. But, on the other hand, if you're bent on going away again, I think you might get a better perspective on your own problems if you were settled somewhere with me than if you were just wandering around homelessly over the face of the globe by yourself."

Helen's voice trailed quietly away into silence. Then she sat still and waited. She had never lost the habit of patience, but it seemed to her that her sister-in-law would never answer her before Zoe finally spoke.

"It's like you to think of me that way, sweetness," she said at last. Her own voice was very gentle now, too, and it broke a little. Helen knew that she was deeply moved and that in speaking she was showing the secret places of her heart, which she seldom bared to anyone. "I think perhaps I'd better tell you how I really feel, just as you've told me how you really feel. Confidences shouldn't be one-sided, to count, they should be mutual. I didn't come home because I was fed up with France. I love France, though I do think things are in an awful mess there just now. I love it better than any one place in the world, I think. I was happy there, as far as I could be happy anywhere by myself. But there's a person I love better than any place. I don't believe I need to tell you that person is Bob."

"Oh, Zoe darling, I'm so glad!"

"Don't be glad too soon. You may not be glad when I get through talking to you. I came home because I felt I had to see

Bob, because I had to be with him. And when I got here he didn't seem to want to talk to me about anything, he didn't seem to want to stay with me unless there was a crowd around. He wasn't disagreeable; he was just indifferent. It was an awful shock to me, though. Like a fool I'd always taken it for granted that whenever I came back he'd be tickled to death to have me, that he'd be sort of sitting around waiting for me. So then—because I was disappointed—well, then I was disagreeable. I was simply hateful. And we quarrelled. Violently. We said all sorts of unforgivable things to each other. On the way down to Dabney's barn dance. That's why Bob went back to Washington the same night—the same morning, rather. It's also why I decided to stay on for a few days and let the world go by. I wanted to think things over. Of course, I didn't know anything about this Mexican scheme of yours. And I thought probably Hunter's Green might be as good a place as any to think things over in. It's done a lot for you."

"It's done everything for me."

"Well, there you are. I've been thinking things over by myself, and finally Welby said some things to me that set me thinking harder than ever. There's something sane and elemental about him, just as there's something fierce and primitive about Ronnie. He put the idea of the man as the head of the family to me in a new light, one I hadn't seen before. Maybe that's the trouble. Maybe Bob looks at it the same way Welby does. Of course, perhaps he doesn't at all, but it's worth finding out. If I could just convince him that however he looks at it, that will be all right by me, just so long as we live together again and love each other again——"

Zoe went back to Washington the next day. Helen saw her depart hopefully. They had come very close to each other again during that twilight talk, and Helen knew that if all went well with Zoe it would be only Bennie that she herself would take to Mexico in the spring. For Ronnie and Welby had said they were willing he should go. There were to be no more paying guests, and they were to have Hunter's Green entirely to themselves for a little while. Helen understood how they felt about that, too.

Zoe had no car of her own in Washington yet, but she borrowed Helen's, which, Helen said, quite truthfully, she did not need, since someone else was always waiting around to take her out in a car, or on horseback, or something. Zoe drove fast, scarcely noticing the countryside through which she was passing, and handed her car keys to the cheerful doorman at the Willard with an air of finality. She had wired Bob that she would be there in time for dinner. She wanted to get to her room and freshen up before he came in.

The clerk at the desk was not as cheerful as the doorman. He responded rather half-heartedly to her brief but agreeable greeting.

Yes, they had saved a suite for her, he said, in accordance with her instructions. But he was afraid she would not be very comfortable. They were having a sit-down strike. All the cooks and waiters. Perhaps she would rather go somewhere else——

"Good grief! Has that sort of thing spread from Paris to Washington? This quick?"

"I couldn't say where it's spread from, Miss Wing. I don't have time to read much foreign news. But it's for you to decide, of course, whether you want to stay."

"I think I'll take the suite just the same. I can eat outside. I'm hoping to get the tenants out of my house or find another in a few days. It won't be for long."

"Very well, Miss Wing. Front, show Miss Wing to her suite."

"And when Mr. Morton comes, don't bother to have him announced. You might impress on the operator that I'm married to him. Send him right up."

She shook her clothes out of her suitcase swiftly, running the water in the bath while she did so. She was rather sorry they would have to go out to dinner; if they could have had it there, in this suite, it would've been at least a little more intimate and homelike. Bob had often told her she had the faculty of "inhabiting" a place, no matter how briefly she was in it, and now, in spite of her haste, she telephoned down for flowers and scattered a few feminine trifles about. She decided, too, that she would put on a negligée; she could change into street clothes later on. She had just slipped into the dressing-gown she had chosen when there was a knock at the door and she flew to open it, to put her arms around Bob's neck and kiss him and say she was sorry and draw him in.

He raised his hands and jerked hers abruptly away. Then he came in, slamming the door after him, and stood with his back against it, still wearing his hat. She had seen him angry hundreds of times before, but this was the first time she had seen him absolutely beside himself with rage. He spoke to her and his words were heavy with fury.

"Why in hell didn't you tell me you'd come back here to be with Giles Arnold? You might at least have done that much, instead of letting me pick it up for myself with the rest of the daily swill."

She was almost overcome with amazement, but, strangely enough, she was neither frightened nor revolted by the way he spoke. Sorry as she was that he had been upset, the whole problem seemed to her so simple that she felt it would be only a matter of minutes before it would be solved. The quietness with which she answered was unforced.

"Bob, I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about. I didn't come back here to be with Giles Arnold. I came back here to be with you. The reason I didn't tell you I'd run into him acci-

dentally is because I completely forgot it. It wasn't important to me and there were so many things to say that were important. And then we quarrelled, which was all my fault, and the only thing I've thought of since has been getting back to you to make up."

"That's your story. But you haven't given a damn, for nearly two years, whether you ever saw me or not. Then, by some curious coincidence, you show up here the same day Arnold does."

"It is a curious coincidence. The last time I saw Giles, until we met on the Congressional, was in Peru. As far as I knew, up to that time, he was still there."

"I know all about your seeing Giles Arnold in Peru. I know what you said before you left, too—that it would serve me right if you did the same thing Isabel did, that you might have better luck. Evidently Giles isn't as virile as he looks."

"Bob, please don't talk to me like that," Zoe said reasonably. She had determined that whatever happened she would not lose her temper this time, or make any angry retort, which would add fuel to the flames of Bob's anger. As a matter of fact, she still did not feel angry, but neither did she feel confident and quiet any longer. A sense of unreality and horror was growing on her. It couldn't be Bob that was talking to her like this. Bob was so essentially decent, in spite of occasional surface coarseness, and so fair and so sane. But it was Bob, and somehow she must answer him and convince him and calm him. "You know if I'd been serious I never would have said such a thing," she went on. "It's just the sort of sharp silly remark I do make when you and I get to quarrelling, or when I start talking out of turn to Helen. It doesn't mean a thing in the world. You know that, too. And I can't let you be unjust to Giles. He's never said a word to me, since you and I've been married, that the whole world couldn't have heard, or made so much as a gesture. He learned a pretty bitter lesson, Bob, with Isabel, and he wouldn't be likely to jeopardize his future a second time for any woman, no matter how she happened to feel about it. And that's another thing you know—how I feel about shabby secret intrigues. You've told me over and over again, of your own accord, that anyway, loose conduct wasn't included in my long list of faults."

"It was true when I told you so. But I haven't told you so for some time. And I'm not telling you so now. You've been on the loose and you've acted on the loose."

"Oh, Bob, I haven't! There's no reason why you shouldn't have known about my seeing Giles in Peru. I realized you knew it. I didn't make any secret of it. There was no reason why I should do that either. A foreign correspondent is apt to see a good deal of the head of a Naval Mission, or any other important person, if it's possible for her to do so. It's part of her job. It hasn't anything to do with loose conduct. It couldn't have, on account of the man—his

standing and his importance—no matter how much on the loose a girl was. I've just explained that to you. I wish you'd listen."

"I'm listening all right. And I know what was possible in your case and probable, too. I'm also aware Giles must have kept in pretty close touch with you since you left Peru. Otherwise you and he would never have landed in New York on the same day and come down to Washington on the same train."

"Bob, I've never once written Giles since I left South America. He's never written me. The fact that he was on the same train with me coming down from New York was a coincidence, as I explained a moment ago. You know that everyone turns up on the Congressional sooner or later. Whoever told you this distorted story must have been on it. There were five or six people I knew in my own Pullman. But I didn't know Giles was there until we bumped into each other going to the dinner."

"You damned dirty little liar!"

For a terrible moment Zoe thought that Bob had struck her across the mouth. Then she knew it was only the impact of his words which made her feel as if he had. But she recoiled, putting her hand to her face as if to ward off an actual blow. Still no answering anger rose to meet his. For the first time, meeting him head on when he was in a rage, she was herself completely controlled, completely obsessed with the idea that had brought her back to Washington in the first place.

"Please don't talk to me like that," she said again, still reasonably. "Of course it's just a manner of speaking, but I don't like it. You know how hard I had to work to cure myself of swearing—probably that's why I'm sensitive on the subject. Well, anyway, Giles isn't back in Washington to see me. He's back because he's been assigned to duty in the Navy Department—the Bureau of Navigation. He's been abroad a long time. You know how these things are worked out—so much sea duty, so much shore duty here and there, so much service in Washington generally, too. It's almost time for him to come up for selection to rear admiral, and after the Board's met, he may be sent almost anywhere."

"He hasn't been abroad half long enough to suit me, and he can't leave Washington soon enough to suit me either. But I'll manage to prevent his promotion if it's the last act of a misspent life. Before Giles Arnold ever gets to be an admiral, I'll blow his brains out, the——"

"Bob, please!"

He took hold of her arms with both his hands. She still felt as if he had struck her, and now as he gripped her elbows with his fingers the dreadful impression deepened. Then he began to shake her.

"Do you really want me to believe you didn't come here to be with Giles Arnold?"

"Of course I want you to believe it."

"All right. Prove it to me."

"How?"

"Pack up. Get out of here."

"*Get out of here!*"

"You heard what I said."

"You want me to go away!"

"Yes, I want you to go away. And I don't want you to come back either. Not as long as Giles Arnold's here."

Somehow she freed herself from his grasp. Somehow she walked to the other side of the room. If her back were towards him, he would not be able to see that she was crying. She must not let him see her crying. Well, she wasn't crying any longer. That is, not any to show. She turned around again.

"That'll be two years, Bob. You don't mean you want me to stay away from you for two years more?"

"I want you to stay away for ten rather than do what you've come back here to do now. You're pretty smart, Zoe—I never said you weren't, and I'm not saying so at this minute. But you're not smart enough to make a fool out of me any longer. You can't live in the house with me, and stage a touching reconciliation, and go around stealing the show at parties where I just tag behind at your heels, and all the time keep seeing Giles Arnold on the sly."

"I'm not trying to make a fool out of you. I'm trying to say I'm sorry I ever left you and that I won't again. I don't care if I never go to another party. I'd be perfectly happy if we could just stay at home together. The reconciliation wouldn't be staged, Bob. It would be real. And I wouldn't see Giles Arnold on the sly. I wouldn't see him at all unless we met by chance. I don't care a thing about seeing him. But if it'll make you feel any better, I'll promise that I won't."

"I'd have believed you once. I don't believe you any more. There's nothing you can say that will make me believe you'd have come back to me, after all this time, unless there'd been a reason for it."

"There was a reason for it."

"Well, it's something that you've got the grace to admit it."

"There was a reason. But it wasn't the reason you think. Bob, please don't send me away from you now. If you do, it'll be the end."

"It was the end the first time you went. You left me flat when I loved you and wanted you and needed you."

"I know I did. That is, I know it now. I didn't know it then. If I had I wouldn't have gone. But I've come back this time to stay."

"I won't have you here. You heard what I said. And you can take your choice. If you go away I won't shoot my mouth off about you and Giles Arnold. But if you stay I'll sue you for a divorce

and I'll name him as co-respondent. Then see how far he gets with the Selection Board."

"Oh, Bob, you couldn't do that!"

"If you're not gone within twenty-four hours you'll find out whether I can or not."

He folded his arms and stood looking at her truculently. There was no doubt whatsoever that he meant what he said, that he would fulfil his threat. Swiftly, she saw more than the destruction of her own happiness. She also saw Giles destroyed, for ever this time, after his long struggle to regain both his self-respect and the respect of his associates and his superiors. She could not let that happen, no matter what it cost her to avert disaster from him. There was so much more than his career at stake this time; there were the last remnants of his confidence in the trustworthiness and integrity of any woman. With only herself to consider, she could have stood her ground and fought a battle of indefinite length. As it was, time told against her as well as everything else. She made a last desperate attempt to appeal to Bob in a different way.

"But, Bob, if I went away like that, it would be different. I mean, not just personally, but professionally, too. I couldn't write for 'Kaleidoscope' if I were just staying away on purpose instead of representing the bureau abroad. It would be the end of *everything*."

"That's all right, too. Don't get the idea I wouldn't like this to be completely final. I would. I'd rather confine the column to Washington; anyway. I never cared a hoot in Hades about the foreign part, anyway. That was your idea. Stick to it. You can get another job, easy enough, as a European correspondent. And you couldn't write about Washington now on a bet. You're not in the know any more. You've been away too much and too long. Your name doesn't mean a thing to anybody as a commentator on news in the Capital, any more than you mean a thing to me as a woman."

He walked back to the door. Then he stopped, with his hand already on the knob.

"If you did, I'd put an end to all this whining of yours about having a baby," he said. "You'd be pregnant all right before I was done with you, and if you went through hell having a child afterwards I wouldn't care. I'd say it served you right. But I don't want you enough to have a child by you. I don't want you enough to stay in the room with you. That's why I'm leaving you. You can go to hell by yourself."

CHAPTER XXIX

WILLIAM RUTHVEN looked at Zoe searchingly from under his green shade. There was nothing about her brief story which did not seem to hold water. At the same time he was suspicious of it.

"You say Bob wants to cut out the 'World Kaleidoscope' column and you're willing he should. I'm rather surprised. Still, Bob may be right. He's developed into a crackerjack newspaperman, and he doesn't often make a mistake. There are always a lot of people who would rather read about Washington than anything else. But why don't you stay here for a while and concentrate on 'Capital Kaleidoscope'?"

"Bob doesn't think I'd better do that either. He thinks I've been away too long, that I've lost touch."

"Well, he may be right about that, too. It's easy to lose the feel of things, and besides, so many new people keep coming in all the time, on this Administration."

"Yes, that's it. I don't know the new people well enough."

It was on the tip of William Ruthven's tongue to tell her it would not take her long to meet the new people, judging by her past performances. It was also on the tip of his tongue to suggest that if she did not want to write about Washington for "Capital Kaleidoscope"—or, if Bob did not want to have her—he himself would be mighty glad to let her do so for the *Examiner*. Then he checked himself. She probably was out of touch. And apparently there was some kind of a rift. He had warned Zoe in the beginning that Bob would expect to wear the pants, and she had said she knew that, and that she wanted him to. But it would be hard for a girl like Zoe to keep her husband's viewpoint in mind all the time, and in a case like this there would be hell to pay when she did not. If Bob and Zoe were really at odds with each other, it would not be so easy for Zoe to re-establish herself on the Hill, where Bob had always been firmly entrenched, and where his presence could now very easily serve as a shut-out; and she had never done as well in the Departments as he had. With her official connections jeopardized in this way—well, an editor could not let his heart get the better of his head—

Zoe sat still, rather expecting him to make the offer which was not forthcoming. Naturally, she would be obliged to decline it, since she did not dare risk a test of Bob's threat to file suit against her unless she left Washington within twenty-four hours. But it would have been reassuring to know that Ruthven considered her valuable as a Washington reporter even if Bob did not. When Ruthven said nothing further on the subject, she fought against the

feeling of having been let down, and waited, with an air of expectation which she still tried to keep confident, to have him reopen the subject she had originally broached.

"Well," he said at last. His tone was curiously flat, and somehow Zoe knew, after hearing that first monosyllable, that there was no use in listening to anything else he had to say. But she could not get up and walk out of the office at this point; there was nothing to do but hear him out. "When I spoke to you about becoming a foreign correspondent for us," he said, "there was an opening. There weren't so many outstanding columnists in those days, hardly any outstanding women columnists. But, of course, that was more than seven years ago. I don't need to tell you that the place I had in mind for you was filled. Besides, it would take an entirely different sort of build-up to put you over now. You were fairly well known then as a representative of the *Examiner*; it would've been easy to make you better known as such. Now you're known as a representative of your own bureau; it wouldn't be so simple to shift you back to the point where you'd have special value to us. You know how these things work out. I don't need to explain."

"No, you don't need to explain."

She rose, thankful that he had finished what he had to say and that she was free to go. There was no room in her mind for anything except relief that she did not have to sit and listen to his toneless voice any longer.

"I'm sorry, Zoe."

"It's quite all right."

"Well, of course it isn't as if you would have any trouble getting a job. Almost any editor would jump at the chance of getting you. It's just on account of the special set-up here."

"I understand perfectly. Thanks a lot, Mr. Ruthven."

It was only a little way from the *Examiner* building to the Willard. But when she had almost reached the hotel Zoe remembered that she had not eaten any dinner the night before or any breakfast that morning, and that she would not be able to get room service for lunch either, on account of the strike which was still going on. She went to a small, cheap café, typical of Pennsylvania Avenue, which advertised specials at cut rates in the naked glass windows, ordered a cup of coffee, and forced herself to drink it to the last drop. Then she went on to the Willard.

The room clerk, who still looked extremely depressed, handed her several folded slips of paper, inscribed with scrawling messages. She unfolded the slips quickly, but by the time she had reached the ninth floor she had stuffed them back into her handbag with apathy. Winchester, Virginia, had called and would like to have her call back; the French Embassy had called and would like to have her call back; Captain Arnold had called and would like to have her call back. But there was no message to say that Bob had

called and that he would like to have her call back. What had happened the night before was not a bad dream. It was a horrible reality.

She unlocked her door and went into the empty suite. The roses which she had bought so blithely were already drooping, their stalks limp just below the flowers. The little knickknacks which she had scattered about looked silly and meaningless. The ashtrays were unemptied, the bed unmade, the towels lying on the floor in the bathroom. She picked up the telephone and asked the operator for the front office.

"I forgot to tell you when I stopped for my key—I'm checking out."

"Yes, Miss Wing. I understand perfectly. I was afraid we couldn't make you comfortable. I'm very sorry."

"It isn't that. I find I have to go to New York."

"Shall I connect you with the porter so that he can get you a reservation on the Congressional?"

"No, thanks. I don't want to take the Congressional. I believe I can catch an earlier train than that."

It did not take her long to get ready, because she had undone so little the night before. When she went downstairs again, to pay her bill, the cashier pushed a small pink slip towards her with her receipt.

"If you'll just leave your forwarding address with us, Miss Wing. Of course, it's just a formality. We know we can always reach you at the office."

"I'll be at the Plaza in New York for a few days. Shall I put that down?"

"Yes, if you please, Miss Wing."

She had not thought very much about money, any more than she had thought very much about food. But after she was on the train she decided she should have chosen a less expensive place than the Plaza, and at Baltimore she sent a wire cancelling her previous reservation, and resolved to go to a small inexpensive hotel near Washington Square. Then, mentally, she began to review her resources.

The sums which she had received for incidental articles, published in the *Tribunal*, *Harkness* and other magazines, were considerable, and after making her regular contributions to the younger members of her family, which she still continued, she had salted away the rest of the money in a savings bank account. But, after all, there had been comparatively few of these articles. The major part of her income had come from the news bureau, and though this had prospered from the beginning, she and Bob had always been agreed that a good deal must be put back into the business if it were to expand in prestige as well as size. They had moved, long before, from their first small bare room in the National Press Build-

ing to far more pretentious quarters, which had a spacious outer office, with private offices on either side. The rent for this suite was high, and besides, Bert and Beverley both commanded and deserved substantial salaries. They were very different, but they were equally efficient. Bert was an outstanding example of the ultimate success sometimes eventually achieved as a result of the old trial and error system—experienced, shrewd, likeable, and far less hardboiled than he either admitted or appeared; his uncouth appearance was assumed rather than accidental, and his lounging manner concealed an immense capacity for speed. Beverley was the thoroughly modern product of a specialized field as technically taught at the best school of journalism in the country—cool, collected, quick and extremely good-looking, in a gaunt, fair, artificial way, which was invariably smart and occasionally startling. They did not always get along together, and they had very little use for each other's methods; but each respected the results the other obtained and both were devoted to the bureau. Zoe considered both indispensable, and would never have dreamed of bargaining with either.

Another girl, named Mary Bethune, had been added to the staff during the last year, and Zoe felt much the same about her. Mary acted as receptionist in the outer office, answered the telephone, saw to the mail, attended to correspondence, and ran errands. She took dictation rapidly, revealed excellent judgment in sizing up the importance both of telephone calls and calls made in person, and picked up various oddments of news, without apparent effort or design, which she passed on freely to her employers. In appearance she was as different as possible from Beverley; a quiet-looking girl, with smooth brown hair and steady brown eyes, who used no make-up and wore inconspicuous, conservative clothes, but she was very attractive in her own way, and her capability was beyond question. Her pay had been good from the beginning, and she had soon suggested, unobtrusively, that she would like to have it increased. The suggestion had been followed with alacrity, because Bob had not been slow in discovering her value, and on this point also Zoe was in thorough agreement with him.

With so much money going into the bureau, neither Bob nor Zoe had as much margin for personal expenditure as was generally supposed, though the growth of their venture had more than justified the investment. At the moment, Zoe had a comfortable balance in her bank account; but she suddenly realized there would be no further additions to it from the same source. She had been paid for everything she had written up to the time she had left France, and for several articles on the general European situation that she had done on the boat coming home. She had written nothing while she was at Hunter's Green. From now on the revenue from the bureau, like the responsibility for it, would be exclusively Bob's. Her own would end with the withdrawal of her by-line and the deletion

of the "World Kaleidoscope." She would not enter into the picture at all.

Of course, there was still the stock farm. She remembered the tidy balance that Welby had shown her with such pride. But she also remembered that she had said, from now on, she would expect only a fourth of the proceeds—no, it would be only an eighth when Bob had had his part. Of course, she could write and tell Welby that on reflection she had changed her mind, that they must keep to their original arrangements of a half-and-half division. But there were other things she remembered in connection with the balance-sheet: Welby's look of joy when he had said Ronnie would not have to work so hard any more; Ronnie's radiance as she had stood in the doorway wearing her green riding habit; the expectant happiness they were sharing in the prospect of having their home to themselves before the birth of another child. If she asked Welby for more money, after all, they might feel they must go on having paying guests, and Ronnie would lose that new glow, and Welby that sense of being the supporter and protector of the household, which he had explained to her meant so much to any normal man. No, it was unthinkable that she should tell Welby she had changed her mind. She had not changed it.

Then there was Helen. Helen had more money than she knew what to do with, and there was nothing on earth she would like better than to share it with Zoe. But, after all, Helen was not only her own friend; she was also Bob's sister. Zoe could not regard her any more with detachment; she must remember the relationship. As soon as she was on board ship again she would send Helen a radio saying that she had unexpectedly been called back to France, and that therefore, to her regret, she would not be able to go to Mexico. But first she must find something definite to do in France, so that this question of money would not keep cropping up to bother her. Bob had said, and Mr. Ruthven had said, that it would be easy enough for her to get a job, and she knew they both believed it. She believed it herself. She would start out next morning and track one down, and then she would be on her way. She did not know many people in New York, no one intimately enough to seek out, with conditions as they were just now. She could not explain her present course, and without explanations this would inevitably arouse curiosity. It would be much better for her to go to the current shows alone in the evenings and devote her days to job hunting. She would not have time to get lonely.

It was not until she had been looking for a job almost a week that Zoe really admitted to herself that she and Bob and Mr. Ruthven had been mistaken after all, that nobody wanted to give her a job, in fact, that no one was even willing to do so. Every newspaper editor whom she approached, if he consented to see her at all, quickly gave her to understand that foreign correspondents were a

drug on the market, as far as he was concerned; she would never have guessed that the indifference of the American public to any form of foreign news could be as complete as outlined by these editors, nor in all the years of her apprenticeship had she ever heard so much about the limitations of space and the inflexibility of budgets. She was more courteously received at the magazine offices which she visited, but the net result was very much the same: the editors of *Tribunal* and *Harkness* would both be very pleased to consider anything she might care to submit to them, and they had no doubt she would pick up some interesting material, here and there, if she went back to Europe. But they were not giving any definite assignments just then. The market was in a queer condition. They were a good deal overstocked. It had been nice to see her again——

When she went to the offices of the French Line in Radio City to pick out a reservation she was still without a job. She had transferred most of the money from her savings account to her bank account, and she had laid in an ample supply of travellers' cheques. But she shook her head when the clerk, who recognized her, thrust the boat plan of the *Normandie* forward for her to see.

"Isn't the *de Grasse* sailing tomorrow? I think I'll take that instead this time. I'd like to get off at once. My passport's in order."

She produced it. She could see that the clerk had already lost interest. It was a shame, she reflected fleetingly, that a race as fine as the French should be so greedy and so mean and so snobbish when it came to a question of money. But then every race had its faults. She remembered what she had heard a famous Frenchman say once: "At heart the Englishman is always insolent; the Spaniard is always cruel; the German is always an invader; the American is always a child; the Frenchman is always a peasant." Well, perhaps that was it; he was a miserly, grasping peasant, putting money away in a sock or a teapot or under a mattress, and cringing to the fool whom he secretly despised, but from whom he could wrest the most to salt away. No, that was not fair. The French were not really like that. The famous man who had framed the epigram had maligned his own people, and hers, and all the others, for the sake of a witticism. It was a terrible thing to be unfair for the sake of a witticism. And sooner or later you were punished for it. She ought to know——

The clerk, still looked bored and supercilious, handed her back her passport, and said he could give her a small single cabin near the ladies' bath. It was the type of stateroom she had designated; but now she told him she did not want it, and walked out of the glittering modernistic office, leaving him to sneer at her retreating figure. At midnight she sailed on the *Batory*, of the Polish-American Line, bound for Gdynia; she had never heard of either the boat or the line before, and she knew very little about the port

for which she was bound except that it was near Danzig; but it was the first boat leaving New York, and she decided to take it. No one knew she was going. No one came to see her off. There were no flowers and no books and no *bon voyage* boxes. Nothing of that sort at all. Just a small unpretentious boat, half empty, leaving an inconvenient dock at an inconvenient hour, in the pouring rain.

She did not mind at all. Nothing mattered any more. She had enough to live on, with care, even without a job, until after Giles had come up for selection. That was all that mattered at present. Later on, when the memory of Bob did not keep stabbing her like a sharp pain, she would know better than she did now what she wanted to do with the rest of her life.

CHAPTER XXX

"I DON'T want to annoy you or detain you, Mr. Morton, but I've got to have some instructions about all these calls for Mrs. Morton."

Bob crossed the outer office and approached the door leading to his own without giving Mary the slightest sign that he had heard her. She rose from her desk and stood in front of the door. She did not do it defiantly; she did it quietly, as she did everything. She had not raised her voice when she spoke or made a sudden rush to get ahead of him. But there she was. Unless he shoved her aside bodily he could not pass.

"I began asking you five days ago," she said, still quietly. "And you haven't answered me yet. Unless I find out pretty soon where I can reach Mrs. Morton I'm afraid there's going to be a lot of troublesome complications. I'd like to save you from those if I could. I've talked with the clerk at the Willard, and he said she gave the Plaza in New York as her next address. When I called up the Plaza, though, and talked with the clerk there, he said Mrs. Morton did have a reservation but that it had been cancelled. The French Embassy has called several times. The Ambassador is very anxious to have a talk with Mrs. Morton about that article of hers on the Lyons riot. He's afraid she's given the American public a wrong idea about the calm conditions in France, and she's always interpreted them so beautifully in the past that he's sure she'd be glad to correct this. Mrs. Windsor says he is most insistent about seeing her at the earliest possible moment. And Mrs. Terraza is very anxious to see her, too. In fact, the last time Mrs. Terraza called she said that if I couldn't give her any information this morning she would come to see you personally. She might just walk in on you when you were pretty busy. She seemed very much troubled about something. Then I don't know what to do about any of these dinner invitations——"

"You can decline them all, that's what you can do," Bob broke in harshly.

"Just as you say, Mr. Morton. The White House? The Italian Embassy? The——"

"Oh, my God, have those begun again? No, I suppose not. But you can start out by regretting 'because of Mrs. Morton's absence from town.' Then if those damned social secretaries come back by asking me to go without her, of course I'll have to."

"Very well, Mr. Morton. And what about your mother? She says she's very much hurt because young Mrs. Morton hasn't been in to see her at all. She wants a thorough inside picture of every-

thing your wife has seen in Europe during the last year and a half, and confirmation of her own impression that the situation there is better than at any time since the World War. She thought that perhaps this evening you and Mrs. Morton would join herself and the Senator for a simple homely meal and a nice long cosy chat."

The door of Bert's office opened slowly before Bob had a chance to answer, and Bert himself slouched into sight. "Hello, Bob," he began. "Say, I just had an idea. Don't you think it would be a good plan for Zoe to go to Detroit? She could go direct from New York—that's where she is now, isn't she? She could write a swell piece on the sitdown strike at G.M.C.—a tie-up with those she saw in France and the one at the Willard. It's right down her alley. Let's get hold of her and ask her to start right away. You've found out where she's staying, haven't you, Mary?"

"Not yet, Mr. Scruggs. I've called the Plaza and the Sherry-Netherlands and the Ritz and the Gotham and the St. Regis and the Biltmore and the Vanderbilt and——"

"What about the Commodore? Don't you always go to the Commodore, Bob?"

"I do. Zoe doesn't."

"Well, try it anyway, Mary. Keep on trying till you get her. She can't be sitting on the kerbstone. I have a hunch she ought to get started for Michigan right away. She can fly. She can——"

"I've been meaning to tell you, Bert. I think Zoe's gone back to Europe."

"Gone back to Europe! To cover what?"

"Anything she feels like."

"You say you *think* she's gone? Don't you *know* whether she's gone or not?"

"No. She hadn't arranged for her passage when she left here. She was going to do that in New York. And look around a little, I believe."

"What on earth does she suddenly want to look around New York for? Nothing's breaking there, and she hates it besides."

"I think she had some sort of an idea of getting assignments before she definitely engaged her passage."

"Getting assignments! That's the last thing on earth she ought to be doing, with everything we need her for. And she wouldn't have any trouble getting passage this time of year—she could take her pick on any boat. Cripes, I hope she hasn't got started! Because she'd be a lot more use to us, right now, in Detroit than in Europe. I thought maybe she'd go on to San Francisco. Go on trying, Mary, for the luva Mike, and see if you can't run her to earth."

"Yes, Mr. Scruggs. That is, you do want me to go on trying, don't you, Mr. Morton?"

The telephone rang. Bob gave Mary a furious glance, intended to convey the idea that this was the time for her to get away from his door and attend to her own job. But Mary looked at him coolly, without moving, and Bert picked up the receiver.

"Hello! Oh, hello, Brenda! No, she's in New York. No, I don't. No, Bob doesn't either. Apparently she changed her plans and forgot to let us know. We're trying to track her down now. Sure, I'll give you a ring. But you'd better lay off till you hear from us again. You don't have to find fillers for your page at this time of year. No, I want Zoe to go to Detroit. I don't want her to get all tangled up here with high sassiety until she's straightened out a few strikes for our dear dense readers. Oh, never mind what I mean. I don't mean anything, as usual. What about a little drink around six? All right. The Press Club. I'll be seeing you. If we find the vanished lady before then I'll let you know."

He hung up the receiver and turned to Bob again. "Brenda wants to write a lead story about Zoe being back and how delighted everyone is at the prospect of seeing her here, there and everywhere," he said. "Her programme of entertaining for the winter and so on. Zoe sure did make a dent in this town as a hostess, and that takes some doing, especially when she's gone so much. Have you heard yet whether you can get your own house back or not, Bob? But then you won't be needing it yet, after all, will you, if——"

"No, I shan't be needing it. Look here, maybe you two haven't got anything to do today except stand around and chew the rag. But I've got to get up on the Hill. And there're two or three people I've got to call up first about appointments and——"

"You'd like to have me tell everyone who calls after this, Mr. Morton, that Mrs. Morton's gone back to Europe? Or that she's going to Detroit? Or that she's in New York for a few days and that you don't know her plans or where to reach her? I don't seem to have any of this straight, even yet."

Mary's determination had begun to take on a deadly quality. Bert spoke to her soothingly.

"Bob seems to be all hot and bothered this morning, Mary. Let him alone, like a good girl."

"I'd be only too glad to let him alone, Mr. Scruggs. But I've been trying to get some kind of an answer out of him for five days now, and there's a limit to everything."

"All right. Listen to me then. Get busy and locate Zoe. If she's in New York, find out where. If she's left for Europe, find out on what bound for which. Don't do anything until you've done that. But do it. I'll take incoming calls on my own phone until you're through. I'll say what I think's best according to who's calling. You can stop worrying about it."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Scruggs."

Mary went quietly back to her seat and dialled for long distance. Bob, now that his door was unblocked, made no immediate move to enter. Instead, he looked at Bert belligerently.

"You haven't by any chance become the head of this bureau overnight, have you, Bert?"

"I've become the acting head. Somebody's got to be the acting head until you're ready to take over again. Which obviously at this moment you're not, more than you have been all this week, as Mary says. If you don't like what I'm doing, you can always fire me. We know Bob can fire anyone he wants to, don't we, Mary? From Zoe down. The only question is, what'll happen to the bureau after he's done it——"

Bert lounged away again, and shut the door of his office after him, speaking to Beverley in a jocular tone as he entered. Mary, having found out that Zoe was not registered at the Commodore, tried the Roosevelt and the Pennsylvania and McAlpin and the Waldorf and the Astor. Then she called up the Washington office of the French Line, and asked the executive secretary if there were a spare copy of the *Normandie's* passenger list on hand. The executive secretary said she would be only too glad to oblige Miss Bethune; she would send the passenger list right around by special messenger. She did so, but Zoe's name was not on it. Mary tried the Cunard Line and the American Line and the Italian Line and the North German Lloyd with the same results.

Bob did not speak to Mary when he went out, at which time she was still telephoning hotels, or when he came in, late in the afternoon, at which time she was still telephoning offices of transatlantic lines. She raised her head, both times, long enough to see who was passing through the office, but she made no further move to detain him. Therefore, when he got inside his own room, intent on writing his piece and getting away, he was unprepared to see Helen sitting beside his desk, gazing reflectively out of the window that faced the Willard.

She looked very pretty and rather complacent, as if on the whole she were very well satisfied with the way life was treating her. But as she turned to greet him, she revealed no exuberant joy. She did not throw her arms around his neck and hug him hard. Instead she accepted his hasty kiss and cool welcome with detachment.

"Hello, kid! Where did you drop from?"

"I drove up from Hunter's Green to have lunch with Giles, and to make some diplomatic calls. Did you know that poor William, the old carriage man, had been very ill for a long time, and that he has to have two assistants now? He was out again today, but he didn't seem a bit like himself. He didn't even know 'Cuba's car' when it came up, and he told me he was 'bowed right down with the misery.'"

"I'm afraid I haven't been giving the matter of William's health the strict attention that I should."

"Well, you don't need to be so sarcastic about it—I was interested in seeing how few people there were at the Italian Embassy, too. There's a lot of feeling about the Ethiopian situation. I can tell that it's bothering Candace a good deal, and Alicia says she has a hard time with her dinner lists—almost everyone regrets—— But the French Embassy was packed and Isabel was right in her element. I met several of Guy's friends there—the English were certainly out in full force, and it was all very chummy and very swanky. Not that it had as much class as Giles' luncheon. He's very pleasantly settled in his own house again, and he certainly had a lovely party. Virgie's gone back to him. We didn't try to keep her when we knew he needed her. We really don't, now that we're getting back to private life again."

"Ideal all around, I should say, unless the Navy Department really wants to get something out of him during working hours."

"This was in honour of some Peruvian naval officers who are here on a special mission. The Secretary of the Navy wanted him to give it. In fact, he came to it himself. Giles tried to get you and Zoe for it, too, but apparently there was some hitch. Zoe knew all these men in South America and they were asking for her. They hoped to meet you, too. It seems they had some sort of a story to give out that they thought you might like to carry exclusively."

"Damned white of them, but I don't have time for parties in the daytime. And I haven't got any time to spare now. What's on your mind? I don't want to hurry you, but I've got a lot of work to get through."

"I didn't forget about your work. But I stayed to talk to Giles for a little while after the other guests had left, and it was rather late when I got here. Not that it would have made any difference if I'd been earlier, so long as you were out yourself. I told Miss Bethune I'd just sit and wait. She let me right in. What a nice girl she is, Bob! I think you're awfully fortunate to have a girl like that in the outer office. She must make a very favourable impression on everyone who comes in."

"Didn't she tell you I wouldn't have any time to talk to you this afternoon?"

"Why, no! She said she'd given you my message and that you ought to be expecting me."

"Did she say 'ought'?"

"Why, yes, I think she did. Not disrespectfully or presumptuously. Just in the manner of meaning that since I'd said I'd be in to see you unless you called me back, and you hadn't, that naturally——"

"I see. Quite the perfect receptionist. Well, I can't talk to you

now, whatever your message was and whatever Mary said. I've got to write my piece."

"All right. I'll sit here until you've finished it and look out of the window. I love to look out of a window. Don't you remember how I used to do it at the Majestic, when we first came to Washington? Well, I still do it, for hours and hours—— It won't make any difference to me if you don't finish your piece before midnight. I've had an enormous company lunch and two Embassy teas. I won't get hungry if I don't have anything more until——"

"Oh, for God's sake, Helen, shut up! I suppose I can't kick you out, if you're bound to stay. But I've got to get started on this."

He attacked his typewriter savagely, muttering something under his breath about women who looked soft but who were actually as hard as nails. Helen paid no attention to it. She resumed her contemplation of the unremarkable Fourteenth Street scene with apparent satisfaction. There were no interruptions. The telephone was answered in the outer office, and no one entered the inner one. When Bob rang for Mary to take his copy to be mimeographed, she handed him a slip of paper on which various items were neatly typed, but she did not speak to him. He glanced over the list, made one or two curt comments, and nodded a dismissal. Then he turned back to his sister.

While he had been occupied with Mary, Helen had moved, and she was now seated facing him, in Zoe's chair, from Zoe's side of the enormous double desk that occupied the centre of the room. Bob's side was littered with papers and gadgets of every description. The blotter was dirty, the reference books dog-eared, the ash-trays overflowing. Zoe's side was in perfect order, as it always was, even when she was working there under great pressure; she never permitted it to become disarranged, and she never kept ornaments of any kind on it. Nevertheless, it now had an empty unused look, different from the look it had when she was there. Only Helen's slim arms, encased in sapphire blue velvet sleeves finished with fine lace frills, and her white, beautifully ringed hands, which she had stretched out across it as she leaned forward, redeemed it from barrenness and desolation.

"Bob," she said, "I want to talk to you about my plans."

Prematurely, he breathed a sigh of relief. "All right," he said, "shoot."

"I'm going to Mexico this spring. I'll probably stay all summer, too. I'm going to take Bennie with me. Ronnie's going to have another baby and we all thought it would be best if she and Welby could have Hunter's Green entirely to themselves for a little while. They're so terribly in love with each other, and this is such a very special baby."

"I have no doubt it's all very touching. But I don't see exactly what it had to do with you."

"Nothing, directly. But a lot indirectly." For the third time she outlined her feeling about returning to Mexico, as she had to Welby and Zoe. "Of course, Bennie will be great company for me. We've grown very fond of each other. And he'll be out of the way, during Ronnie's confinement. But I really ought to have a duenna, too. And I thought Zoe would be ideal for that."

"I don't know enough about duennas to judge."

"Well, I do. So I asked her. And she said she'd be glad to go with me, if it weren't for the fact that she'd set her heart on not leaving Washington any more for any length of time."

Bob's jaw stiffened. He made no answer.

"She said, 'It's like you to think of me that way, sweetness. But I think perhaps I'd better tell you how I really feel, just as you've told me how you really feel. I love France better than any one place in the world. I didn't come home because I was fed up with it. I was happy there as far as I could be happy anywhere by myself. But there's a person I love better than any place. I don't believe I need to tell you that person is Bob.'"

"Either you're making this up as you go along, or you're more gullible than I ever thought you were, which is saying a good deal."

"I'm not making anything up, and I'm not half as gullible as I look. Zoe doesn't often say much about very personal private things. You know that. But this time she went on and on. I may not be repeating her exact words, but I think I am, pretty nearly, because they made such an impression on me. She said, 'I came home because I felt I had to see Bob, because I had to be with him. And when I got here, he didn't seem to want to talk to me about anything, he didn't seem to want to stay with me unless there was a crowd around. He wasn't disagreeable; he was just indifferent. It was an awful shock to me though. Like a fool, I'd always taken it for granted that whenever I came back he'd be tickled to death to have me, that he'd be sort of sitting around waiting for me. So then—because I was disappointed—well, then I was disagreeable. I was simply hateful. And we quarrelled. Violently. We said all sorts of unforgivable things to each other. On the way down to Dabney's barn dance. That's why Bob went back to Washington that same night. It's also why I decided to stay on for a few days and let the world go by. I wanted to think things over. And finally Welby said some things to me that set me thinking harder than ever. He put the idea of the man as the head of the family to me in a new light, one I hadn't seen before. Maybe that's the trouble. Maybe Bob looks at it the same way Welby does. Of course, perhaps he doesn't at all, but it's worth finding out. If I could just convince him that however he looks at it, that will be all right by me, just so long as we live together again and love each other again——'"

"Are you really telling me the truth, Helen?"

"Of course I'm telling you the truth. Why on earth should I

tell you anything else? Zoe and I talked together for hours and hours. We haven't any secrets from each other at all. When she finally left, it was agreed that if everything was all right, that is, if you would let bygones be bygones, she was going to stay here. If you'd forgive her, was the way she put it. But I don't suppose, when you come right down to it, you had anything more to forgive her than she had to forgive you."

"I don't suppose I had."

"Well, I'm thankful to hear you admit it. Because I've been worried. You see, the final understanding was that if after she'd talked to you, she found you wouldn't, well, forgive her, or whatever you want to call it, she would come back to Hunter's Green and stay there until I could get ready to leave for Mexico. And I've waited and waited for some word. Then finally I got this, to-day, just before I left Berryville."

Helen took a folded radiogram from her handbag and handed it to her brother.

"TERRIBLY SORRY PLANS CHANGED UNEXPECTEDLY"—he read—"AM RETURNING TO EUROPE FOR INDEFINITE STAY IN UNDETERMINED TERRITORY PLEASE GIVE SOMEONE ELSE WONDERFUL CHANCE FOR MEXICO LOTS OF LOVE AND GOODBYE"

He sat staring at the message with such a strange expression on his face that Helen began to wonder if he were doing so unseeingly. At last she could not stand the suspense any longer.

"Bob, you did see Zoe when she came back to Washington, didn't you?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"Well, didn't she tell you the same thing she told me? That she'd come back because she wanted to be with you? That she loved you so much nothing else mattered to her?"

"Yes, she did tell me that."

"Then why should her plans have changed suddenly? Why should she be starting off for an indefinite stay in undetermined territory? Why doesn't she give me some sort of an address where I could reach her? Why does she say goodbye as if it were so final?"

"I'm afraid it is final, Helen. I'm afraid Zoe's gone for good this time."

"But——"

"It's my fault. She did try to tell me the same things she'd told you, but I wouldn't let her. I wouldn't listen. I was too busy saying things to her. Things she'll never forgive. I couldn't ever ask her to."

"I don't believe there's anything you could say to Zoe that she wouldn't forgive."

"Would you have forgiven Alfredo if he'd called you every sort

of dirty disgraceful name he could think of and laid violent hands on you while he was doing it?"

"No. But it's unthinkable that Alfredo would ever have done such a thing. It's unthinkable that you should ever do such a thing. I don't believe you did. No decent self-respecting man would do that to his wife."

"It may be unthinkable but it's true. It's exactly what I did. I've been getting ready to do it for a long time. I don't mean consciously. But I started out with a chip on my shoulder and gradually it developed into a grievance. One thing led to another and by and by they all piled up and——"

"You've been harbouring hard feelings against Zoe a long time?"

"Well, something like that. It's a complicated story. I couldn't go into it all. Do you mind if we don't talk about it any more just now?"

He got up from the desk. Helen, with her usual deceptively gentle persistency, sat still.

"But what's going to happen to the bureau, Bob, without Zoe?"

"I don't know. I told her it could get along all right without her. Of course, it can't. Of course, it needs her the worst way. Bert thought she ought to start for Detroit today, to cover this big sit-down strike that's going on out there in General Motors and then go on from there to San Francisco to look into the longshoremen's strike. Of course, she could have. She knows more about strikes than all the rest of us put together. She could've written a piece about them that would have been a knock-out."

"It's too bad you didn't think of that a little sooner. But she can't write about General Motors and longshoremen from Europe. What's going to happen to Zoe unless she has some link with the bureau?"

"That's easy to answer. She won't have any trouble getting another job."

"But if she had another job, a definite assignment, she'd know where she was going to be, wouldn't she? And she'd tell me, in a radiogram, because she'd know that presently it'd pop out in her pieces. There wouldn't be any point in making a mystery of it."

"That's so. I hadn't thought of that. It never occurred to me that Zoe would have any trouble getting a job. Why, she's always had a job, even when she was a little half-starved unknown kid——"

A look of complete incredulity had come into his face. But it was more than unbelieving. It was stricken. Helen saw it, and spoke more gently, though she still spoke insistently.

"And what's going to happen to you, Bob, if——"

"Helen, I told you about ten minutes ago I'd rather not talk about this any more just now. I mean it. I'll come down to see you Sunday, if you like. We can go into it some more then. But I've

had a sort of knock-out blow myself, and I've still got quite a lot to do tonight— Have you some way of getting home all right?"

Helen picked up her sable muff and smoothed it. The look of complacency which Bob had noticed on her face when he first came into the office and which had disappeared while she was talking about Zoe had returned. Her voice was smooth as silk when she answered.

"Oh yes! Giles is going to take me home. He said he'd be at the Fourteenth Street entrance about half-past six and just drive around the block till I came out. I'm afraid he's had a very long wait, but he'll forget about that after we get started. There's a very nice little moon. We'll have a pleasant drive down into the country."

Helen smoothed her muff again, laid it down, fastened her collar and drew on her gloves.

"I'm sorry Giles is quite so old," she said reflectively. "When we first came to Washington, when it was possible to think of him as forty-ish, it wasn't so bad, especially as he didn't begin to look it. But there's an awful difference between being forty-ish and fifty-ish, isn't there? At least, I think so. If I didn't, I believe I'd consider Giles very seriously. He's awfully eligible, except for his age. Zoe noticed how he had aged when she saw him in Peru. She wrote me about it at the time."

"Giles Arnold! Eligible for you!"

"Why, yes! You know he'd never marry Isabel now, Bob, if she were the last woman in the world. And Zoe forgot all about him years ago, except as a source of copy. I think that rather hurt his pride. And it's natural he should want to get married to someone, sometime, isn't it? Men as attractive as Giles don't usually stay single for ever. He really is awfully attractive still. I think dark men are awfully good-looking when their hair begins to get grey around the temples. Grey hair of that sort has always intrigued me. And here I am, completely unattached and everything—"

"Giles Arnold wants to marry you!"

"Why, yes! I don't see what you think there is so strange about it, except that Giles is old enough to be my father. But that might work out very well, when you come to think of it. Lots of people want to marry me, Bob. Didn't you realize that? It's just that I haven't decided yet how I'd like to spend the rest of my life. But I can see lots of advantages in being married to an admiral, and of course Giles will be an admiral pretty soon now—probably by the time I've made up my mind what I do want to do. However, I'm like you in one respect. I'd rather not talk about anything that is indefinite. And I don't think it's fair to keep Giles waiting any longer. I mean, waiting to drive me home. Good-night. I hope you'll feel lots better in the morning."

She went into the outer office, smiling her secret, pleased little

smile as she went. Mary Bethune's typewriter was covered, her desk light out, her belongings in excellent order. The outer office was dusky and deserted. But in the office beyond a light was still burning brightly. Helen, who had always liked Bert Scruggs very much, decided to have a word with him before she left. She tapped on the door and opened it.

Bert Scruggs had gone. But Beverley Bonner was still there, standing in front of a small mirror and carefully applying make-up to her pretty piquant face. She was dressed in stylish street clothes, so fresh that they gave the effect of having just been put on, and a perky little pointed hat, with a very long, very narrow red feather thrust through it. She nodded to Helen agreeably as she finished putting around her mouth a line of red which matched her feather.

"Why, hello, Mrs. Terraza!" she said. "Have you and Bob got through talking at last? I began to think you were settling the fate of nations. I'm really rather provoked with him. This is the second time within a week that he's been late to a dinner date with me."

CHAPTER XXXI

CONSIDERING the handicaps of his profession, Bob was a fairly prompt person. He had very seldom kept Beverley waiting when they had a dinner date, and as they had had a good many in the course of five years, she could afford to be good-natured about the delay now.

These dates had begun quite accidentally. During Zoe's first absence in Europe, after the death of the baby, Bob had often been obliged to stay late at the office because the work was so heavy for him to handle without her. Beverley had taken it for granted that she was expected to stay late also, since there was no one else to help him, and she had proved herself capable of sharing a killing schedule, as well as willing to do so. She never shirked and she never complained, whether the thermometer soared to a hundred, or a big story broke after the copy was already in for the day, or a series of petty interruptions kept calling her from her typewriter. Bob admired, with reason, the way she stuck to her job through one endless gruelling day after another; and when he discovered that one of her idiosyncrasies lay in declining to leave the office for so much as a snack until the last item of the day's news had been dispatched, he began ordering food to be sent in, by messenger service, standing over her while she ate it and sharing it with her.

"You've got to stoke a furnace," he reminded her undramatically, as they consumed milk from paper cups and bit into ham sandwiches. "When you don't the fire goes out. If you let your fire go out, Beverley, I would have a cold house and no mistake."

"I won't let the fire go out. But I don't need any supper, Bob, really I don't. I ate a big lunch."

"Such as what?"

"Well, I had a cocoa and a fruit salad and——"

"Look here. You're not trying to get any thinner, are you? Because you already look as though you were wasting away from galloping consumption, or whatever it was girls used to have before this fad for doing it on purpose began."

"No, I'm not really trying to get any thinner. Of course, I wouldn't like to be fat, but——"

"Oh, you wouldn't like to be fat! So now we are getting to the bottom of things. What do you have for breakfast?"

"Coffee."

"With cream and sugar?"

"No. Just coffee."

"And what else?"

"Why, nothing else."

Bob threw up his hands. "All right. You listen to me, young

lady. I can't very well come to your maiden's bower and stuff cereal and bacon and eggs and muffins down you at seven-thirty a.m. And I can't supervise your lunch either, because I'm hoofing it all over town myself at lunch-time. But I am going to see to it that you eat some supper whenever we're both still in the office at supper-time. Do you get that?"

"Yes, I get that."

"All right. Remember, I'm the boss here, and whatever I say goes. You can promise to eat at least one square meal a day or you can start looking for another job."

"Oh, Bob, you wouldn't fire me just because I don't eat!"

There was dismay in her voice, so genuine that he was ashamed of having alarmed her. He hastened to reassure her.

"Of course I wouldn't fire you. Not that you couldn't get a dozen better jobs if I did. But I couldn't get along without you. You're doing fine. I haven't got anyone else, now that Zoe's gone. It would take me weeks and weeks to train in a new girl so that she'd know the ropes as well as you know them now, even if she had enough above the ears in the first place so that she could ever learn them. It's always a gamble in the beginning. It was a gamble when we took you. But it isn't a gamble any more. You're a push-over. Incidentally, you are also very nice. I like you a lot."

Beverley's expression of dismay faded. She began to look not only relieved, but pleased.

"I'm awfully glad," she said. "Because—well, I suppose I could get another job, though I've never noticed any jobs hanging around on bushes, ready to pick off, the way some people talk about them. But I like the work here. It's interesting. And I do feel I'm getting the hang of it. Besides, I like you, too. You're easy to work for. You expect to have a lot done, but you're very fair and very decent. I mean in every way."

She spoke so earnestly that Bob felt a little uncomfortable. He had not meant to become involved in such a serious conversation. He picked up his hat and made towards the door.

"Well, I've got to be getting along," he said. "Have those notes on the debt moratorium whipped into shape before I come back, will you? And try again to see if you can't dig out the dirt on that muffin hound in the State Department who's alleged without proof to have been running pretty much amuck among the girls. See you later."

It was a good deal later when he saw her, later than he had intended or expected. It had been one of those days when he had been detained and handicapped at every turn, and he returned to the office both exasperated and exhausted. The data for which he had asked were all lying, neatly typed, on his desk. So was the draft of a news story, labelled, "I thought maybe this would do to send out tonight if you're too late getting in to write one yourself." A

battered table, ordinarily covered with dusty stacks of the Congressional Record, had been cleared, and adorned with a gay paper cloth, paper napkins, crockery and nickelware; there was even a little vase, with artificial flowers, in the middle. Beverley had evidently found time during the course of the afternoon to do some shopping, and the result was surprisingly cheering.

"I got them at the five and ten," she said, half proudly and half apologetically. "Lisa dropped in, and she offered to listen to the telephone. I was only gone a few minutes. But if we are going to have supper here I don't see why we don't eat it at a table in comfort, instead of perched on the corner of a desk. It won't take us any longer."

"So it won't. And I'd say you have a very neat touch, Beverley, if anyone should ask me."

He thought, with a wave of nostalgia, of Zoe's first little one-room flat, and of her heroic effort to make it homelike and hospitable. What Beverley had done was comparable to this. She straightened a spoon, and went on talking, purposefully.

"There's just one thing I'd like to say, Bob, and I hope you won't misunderstand me. I'd like to pay for the supper every other night. Because I would have to buy mine somewhere, if I didn't eat it here, and, after all, you are my boss and——"

Well, that was like Zoe too, or like what Zoe had been in the beginning, simple and square and straightforward, only Beverley was sweet about it, where Zoe would have been sharp. He did not force Beverley to enlarge on her theory or hesitate in his answer to it.

"All right, if you'd rather. I get you—— Say, Beverley, this is a swell story of yours. Let's get it set just as it stands. I'll use the one I meant to write tomorrow instead. It's the kind that'll keep, for a wonder."

After the adjournment of Congress in mid-July, Bob was usually able to get away from the office earlier, because his days were not so overcrowded. There were very few formal functions in the summer-time, however, and when he was gathering friends into the Alexandria house to have potluck with him, he nearly always asked Beverley to be one of the group. Not infrequently he also suggested her name when he was dining casually with friends and they asked him to bring along an extra girl. She was handy about mixing drinks and stirring up salads and scrambling eggs; on Sunday evenings, when nearly everyone was servantless, she was a practical asset to any party, besides being an ornamental one. Her bridge was acceptable, her dancing excellent; by the time Zoe returned from Europe, Beverley had made a secure place for herself in the circles where Bob himself was happiest and most at home.

Zoe showed neither surprise nor resentment because this was so.

She herself had liked Beverley from the beginning, and it seemed natural to her that other people should like the girl too. The crockery and cutlery which Beverley had bought for office suppers were still there, in a desk drawer, and one day, while rummaging for something else, Zoe came across it. She had not heard about this before, and she was mildly astonished. The suppers were a good idea, she thought, for both Bob and Beverley. But why had they never told her about them? If they only had, it would have saved her from worrying lest Bob were not eating balanced meals at regular hours while she was away. Bob, seeing that she was far more puzzled by his omission of the subject than she would have been by a jocular statement that he had not been inconsolable while she was gone, felt a resurgence of the slight embarrassment which had unaccountably kept him silent in the first place. Of course, there was no reason why he should not have told Zoe about the suppers; they had been not only innocent, but logical. And yet, to have made a point of writing about them or speaking about them when there was no reason for doing so would have seemed to give them an importance which they did not warrant. It would have been hard to say casually, "By the way, Beverley and I have been having supper together almost every night. I found she wouldn't eat at all unless I stood over her and made her do it. She insisted on paying her share, though." That would have been dragging it in by the horns. And yet, how could he have spoken about it at all unless he did drag it in by the horns?

His slight discomfiture did not trouble him long. He and Zoe slipped quickly into their accustomed round of gaieties, which became more and more official in character as the season advanced, and they saw less and less of Beverley for this reason out of working hours. She did not "train with the embassy set," but with the newspaper crowd and minor office-holders. Great mutual cordiality prevailed, however, when they did see her, and the atmosphere of the news bureau was highly harmonious. Indeed, it was not until just before Zoe left for the London Economic Conference the following summer that this harmony was ruffled in the slightest degree. It was Zoe herself who troubled the waters in giving her parting directions to Beverley.

"... And don't forget to feed the brute. He needs his nourishment and you need yours. Better dust off those dishes in the desk drawer. And, by the way, Bob's birthday is in August—the ninth. Can I depend on you to get a cake for the occasion? With thirty-six candles?"

"Why, yes, Zoe, I'll be glad to see that he has a cake. But unless something awfully big is breaking on August ninth, of course we won't have supper in the office that night, now that I know it's his birthday. I didn't last year. He never mentioned it. But I'll talk to some of the rest of the crowd, and we'll have a party."

Her tone of voice, as well as her words, was natural and friendly, while there had been a little sting in Zoe's. Bob, who was present when the dialogue took place, was so far reassured that he changed his mind about telling Zoe not to talk that way to Beverley, which for a moment he had meant to do. But after Zoe had gone he felt self-conscious the first time he proposed supper. He did not succeed in doing it as offhandedly as he had intended; and Beverley answered in a way which betrayed that she herself had been self-conscious about the matter ever since Zoe had spoken to her.

"I'm not hungry, Bob. It's too hot."

"Rats! It's a nice cool, comfortable evening for Washington in summer, not over ninety-five in the shade."

"And I'm almost through, anyway. I think I can clear everything up in fifteen or twenty minutes."

"And then go supperless to bed?"

"No, I'll drop in somewhere."

"Well, if you'd rather drop in somewhere than have supper sent in here, do you mind if I go along? No one has shown any disposition to give me a free meal tonight, and the servants are having a vacation. So I've got to buy food somewhere. But I always thought it was sort of cosy having supper here."

"Yes, it was. But——"

"Oh, for the luva Mike! You're not worrying about what Zoe said to you? Or, rather, the way she said it?"

"Yes, Bob, a little. I'm awfully fond of Zoe. I admire her. I think she's the eighth wonder of the world. I wouldn't hurt her for anything."

"Well, you may not have noticed, but I'm rather fond of Zoe myself, and I sort of admire her too. But I don't see how she's going to be hurt if you and I have a messenger-service supper here in the office. She's probably having dinner at Claridge's with one of the greatest bigwigs of the Economic Conference at this very moment."

"You forget the difference in time."

"No; fashionable London dines late, or so I've heard, and unfashionable Washington dines early. Come on—what do you say?"

"I said no, Bob. I said I'd be through pretty soon and——"

"All right, that settles it. We don't have supper here, but we do go somewhere else and have it. You remember what I said once before about firing you if you didn't do what I told you to?"

"Yes. But it doesn't frighten me now to hear you say it. I know you're not going to fire me."

She smiled confidently. He leaned over her desk, smiling too.

"Yes, I am, the first thing tomorrow morning, unless you come to the Danish Rose with me tonight."

"What's the Danish Rose?"

"I'm going to show you."

It proved to be a pleasant, unpretentious little restaurant on Seventeenth Street, almost round the corner from the apartment house where Beverley lived. Bob teased her because she had never discovered it for herself, and said this proved to him conclusively that she never ate anything anywhere unless he made her do it. They lingered over their excellent dinner, and Bob took her home, but she did not ask him in, and he did not suggest that she should. Nevertheless, the evening marked the beginning of a new departure. They did not have any more suppers sent into the office, but they went out to dinner two or three times a week, and nothing more was said about having Beverley pay for her share. She could not very well reach across the table at the Danish Rose or the Talley-Ho or the Parrot or the Silver Bowl and seize the check.

Congress adjourned a month earlier than it had the year before. This made it seem more logical not to have supper sent in, since the work was done earlier. It also made it seem logical for them to go farther out into the country, once in a while, to Collingwood or Normandy Farms or the Toll House Tavern or the Little Tea House, and on the nights when they did not go out of town, to do something after dinner. There were plenty of movies, and air conditioning was getting more and more general; it was refreshing to sit in a cool, dark auditorium after a hot, hectic day, and often they saw the same show through twice in succession. For variety they went to the Cross Roads Theatre at Bailey's Road, and saw standard plays produced in a brightly painted red barn, the owner of which had opportunely discovered that aspiring young thespians were a source of more substantial income to him than cows. They also went to the concerts of Latin-American music, in the Aztec garden behind the Pan-American Union, where the white-coated orchestra sat against a curving background of blue tiles, and the big lilies lay motionless in the warm pool. But best of all they liked the Sunset Concerts at the Watergate, beside the Memorial Bridge, to which they could listen from a canoe, drawn up close beside the barge which was attached to the shore by pontoons.

"It isn't just the music," Beverley said softly one evening. "It's the little lighted tugboats chugging past, and the airplanes swooping overhead, and the colour of the sky, changing from blue to green and then to black, and the crowd, so huge and merry, and yet so still—so rapt. It's everything. Isn't that the way you feel about it, Bob?"

It was not an especially brilliant or original comment on her part. Five thousand other persons at the concert, more or less, must have felt the same way, and doubtless half that number had given tongue to their feeling. But Bob answered enthusiastically, pleased because she had put his own reaction into words.

"Yes, that's exactly the way I feel about it. And strange as it may seem, I do like the music, too. That Fifth Symphony—it does some-

thing to you, doesn't it? I never knew classical music could make you feel like that. I always thought it was dull and dreary."

Zoe sent Bob a cable on the ninth of August, wishing him many happy returns and asking if Beverley had remembered to have a birthday party for him. He cabled back that Beverley had, and that it had been grand, only everyone was sorry Zoe was not there, too. After that, nothing more was said on the subject until Zoe got home, and again had occasion to rummage through the extra desk. Then she missed the supper things and asked Bob what had become of them. He answered nonchalantly.

"I guess Beverley must have taken them away. We didn't use them any this year."

"What did you do instead?"

For the first time, he answered rather stiffly.

"I don't get you, Zoe."

"You don't mean to tell me that you and Beverley never saw each other out of office hours all the time I was gone?"

"Of course we did. We couldn't very well help it. We train with the same crowd. Lowbrow to you. The ambassadors and cabinet officers and their wives sort of forget about me when you're not in town."

"Oh, I see."

She did not ask any more questions just then, and the next year, when she came home after revealing the remarkable "flair for funerals" about which Bob had teased her, she did not ask any at all. But she did not fail to sense something in the air, when he redoubled the small attentions, like sending her flowers, about which he had grown somewhat slack, and deferred to her wishes in little ways about which he had formerly been stubborn. She was also not unobservant when he caught her up so quickly as they were driving to their dinner at the French Embassy, and she turned down his suggestion of getting another man into the office.

"He'd probably fall for Beverley, and then we'd have the place riddled with romance and nothing would get done," she had said, and feeling him start a little, had added quickly, "What's the matter, Bob?" He had answered readily enough, "Nothing. I didn't think about a romance, that's all. I reckon you're right; we better get along the way we are." Afterwards, when the unexpected chance had come to have Bert, leaving them free to go to Mexico, she had instinctively awaited other telltale signs of uneasiness on Bob's part. But none had been forthcoming. Bob had been as pleased as she was at the addition of Bert to the staff. He thought the world of Bert and recognized his value. But then there was nothing about the rangy, slouchy newspaperman to suggest the complication of romance to anyone—not to Bob or Beverley or Zoe and certainly not to Bert himself.

Of course, if Bert had not come to them, they would not have gone to Mexico, and if they had not done that, and Bob had not gone to Cuernavaca with Guy, when Zoe wanted him to stay at the Casa Catalina—well, then many things would have been different. So perhaps Bert, who would not consciously have hurt a fly, was indirectly responsible for what happened next after all. For Zoe, as she told Helen truly, had never appealed to Bob, spontaneously, again after that dreadful day of the carnage at Coyoacan. Helen, wrapped in her grief, had still been gentle; but Zoe, wrapped in her hurt pride, had been very hard. Bob had tried to break through the wall of this pride, and she had repulsed him. She had done more than that. She had talked to Helen about his "compensations," and said that "ladies rather than liquor" were his weakness. Helen had never referred to these conversations in speaking with Bob herself; but the bond which bound brother and sister together was so close that Bob knew instinctively that Zoe had said something, even before she began upbraiding him and mentioning Beverley's name in doing so.

They had never quarrelled before as they did that night; and there had been a quality in Bob's anger which convinced Zoe she had accused him unjustly, and that the rebuke he dealt her so unsparingly could only have been based on righteousness. Deep down in her heart she knew that his conscience was clear, that there had indeed been nothing between Beverley and himself but the sort of companionship which is achieved between two congenial spirits that are both lonely and groping, and the sort of conviviality into which such companionship sometimes develops when close friends are in jovial crowds instead of by themselves. She knew that he admired her own talent and that such jealousy of it as existed—and he did not deny its existence—was based on the fact that it took her farther and farther from him all the time, for longer and longer periods. She knew that he still loved her and still needed her, that he missed her when she was gone and eagerly awaited her return. She knew that the corroding consciousness of his lapse in Mexico had never left his mind, and that it gave him no peace. And yet, knowing all this, she had lain rigidly alone in her own room all night, after flinging herself out of his presence, because he had used words and gestures which had hurt her feelings as well as her pride. She had not returned to him saying she was ready to take her share of the blame for the widening breach between them and the bitterness that was choking and crushing their mutual love. If she had only done this, during the healing hours of darkness, he would have told her, in his turn, that he was sorry and ashamed, he would have shown his penitence and humbly begged her forgiveness. But when morning came it was too late for her to seek him out; the fateful moment when reconciliation would have been beautiful and possible had passed; and what she did not know was that he too

had lain awake all night, hoping for her coming, kept from coming to her only because he believed she would again repulse him and malign him if he did so.

After that, he did not again ask her to give up her project of spending a year in South America, or suggest that the presence of Giles in Peru had anything to do with her plan of going there; and when an offer came to them for the rental of their house from Mr. Jacob Lichtenstein, who had recently been appointed to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, he agreed with her that they might as well accept it, that he himself would be better off in town. He was co-operative in regard to her final arrangements for departure, sympathizing for the discomfort she underwent in taking the required inoculations and vaccinations prior to securing visas, and going himself to the various embassies and legations to obtain these, in order to save her time and trouble. When she was closing her bags the lock on one of her suitcases proved refractory, and he put it down flat on the floor and knelt over it, tinkering with it until he had convinced himself that henceforth the lock would snap open and shut dependably. When he straightened up, hoisting the suitcase into an upright position at the same time, he saw that she was standing over him, and that the little whimsical smile which he loved, and which he had not seen in a long while, was hovering around the corners of her mouth.

"Thanks a lot, Bob, for taking so much trouble. I'd have been bothered with that lock all the way to Cape Horn and back again if you hadn't fixed it for me. It's the sort of thing no porter ever seems to have enough sense to do. Besides, it's gratifying to see you on your knees in front of me. That's a sight I never expected to witness."

"Stranger things than that have happened. I'd have been willing to get down on my knees in front of you, a good many times, if I'd known you wanted me to."

"And when was all this?"

"Oh, a long time ago."

"I thought so."

"But with encouragement I might recapture that habit of thought."

Even then she could have reopened the suitcase he had just fixed for her, she could have unpacked her clothes, she could have telephoned Mr. Lichtenstein that he could not have the house after all. That is, looking back on it, Bob knew she could have done it. At the moment, it seemed to him too late, as it did to her, for such a dramatic gesture. And he himself was the one who said something, drily, to hide the desolation in his heart, which really did make it too late.

"However, you've never given me any encouragement, have you, Zoe? About anything? Quite the contrary. Come on, it's time to

get going. You mustn't miss the boat, after all the trouble you've taken, with those vaccinations and visas and everything."

He went over to New York to see her off. The boat sailed at three in the afternoon, and he made a good connection in catching a plane back to Washington. Instead of going directly home, he went instead to the office. Beverley looked up, in genuine surprise, as he entered.

"Why, Bob! I didn't expect to see you here tonight!"

"I didn't expect to come here. But I hate going back to a house that someone who's just sailed has left. I've done it a good many times now. And tonight I just couldn't face it. It's sort of like going to a house where there's been a funeral. Everything is abnormally tidy and abnormally silent and abnormally empty."

She nodded understandingly. "I know, Bob. I'm sorry. But can you think of anything you'd like to do instead?"

"Well, I thought there'd be enough work here to keep me busy for a while."

"There isn't. Bert cleaned up things pretty well before he left. And I've just about finished the rest."

"I bet you haven't had any dinner yet."

"No, I haven't. But it's hardly dinner time."

"It's after seven. Put on your hat like a good girl and see the boss through a great crisis in his career."

She hesitated, but not for very long. They went to the Danish Rose and had a dollar dinner, prosaically, neither one eating very much of it. Then he walked around the corner with her to her apartment. This time he did ask her if he might come in.

"It's early yet, lots too early to settle down for the night. I've still got to fill in two or three hours. Can I listen to the radio or look at magazines or something?"

"Why, yes, if you want to. I suppose you'd like a drink, too, wouldn't you? If you would, we'd better stop and get some whiskey. I haven't got any. Just a little beer on the ice."

"The beer would suit me fine. I'm not thirsty, and I'm not bent on going on a binge or drowning my troubles in drink. I'm just lonely, that's all."

"I know. Well, of course you're welcome. Not that I can do much to help."

Beverley's little apartment was rather drab. She did not have much time or much money to put into it, and she did not possess the gift, which Zoe had revealed under similar circumstances, of managing to create an attractive effect without either. The bed-living room contained the inevitable studio couch, one large English lounge chair, two or three rickety lesser chairs, a battered gate-legged table pushed up against the wall, and combination desk and chest of drawers. The walls, the rugs and the floor were all more or less the same dull colour, and the pictures were photographic copies

of bromidic masterpieces, relieved by one or two sentimental coloured prints. There was a piano lamp with no piano to go with it, and a book rack that had only dog-eared magazines in it. The bathroom door, slightly ajar, revealed gloves, handkerchiefs, stockings, "bras" and "briefs" hung up to dry in limp array. The kitchenette was no more appealing. The gas range was rusty, the refrigerator leaking slightly and the sink filled with dishes which had been left there to soak. Beverley apologized for the disorder with obvious distress.

"If I'd only known you were coming I wouldn't have left everything so messy. But I'm always in such a rush to get started to the office early. And it doesn't seem to matter, when you live all alone."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you. Nothing matters then. Or you get to feeling that it doesn't. I won't look at the mess, Beverley. I won't look at anything."

She knew he could not help doing so, used, as he was, to exquisite order. But she did the best she could for him. The lounge chair, in which she installed him, though undeniably dingy, was comfortable, and the beer she brought him was dry and cold. She gave him a copy of *Saturday Evening Post* and turned on the radio to a musical programme which was very good. He looked through the magazine and they listened to the music as long as it lasted. Then, for nearly an hour, they simply sat in silence. At last Bob got slowly out of the chair.

"I suppose I ought to go. I suppose I must go back to that house where there's been a funeral."

Beverley did not answer.

"I've got to, haven't I, Beverley? There's nowhere else I can go, logically, until the Lichtensteins move into the house. They're not going to do that till next week. They want it thoroughly cleaned first. My God, as if it weren't clean enough already! It's so clean it hurts you."

Still Beverley did not answer.

"You can't think of anything else I could do, can you, Beverley, except to go back to that empty house?"

"No, Bob. I'm sorry. But I'm afraid I can't."

"You wouldn't let me stay here, would you? Just this one night?"

"Bob, you know——"

"Don't say I know you're not that kind of a girl. I've got fooled two or three times on what kind a girl was, but if I couldn't find out what kind you were in the last three years, I'd never find out anything. Of course you're not that kind of a girl."

"Well, then, you do know."

"But, Beverley, I'm so terribly lonely. I'm—bereft. That sort of loneliness is like death. I wasn't using just a figure of speech when I said I felt as if there'd been a funeral."

"I know you weren't."

"But how could you?"

"Because I'm lonely, too."

"But if you're lonely, too——"

"Then I'd be glad to have you stay? Of course I'd be glad to have you stay. You say you know everything about me, and still you didn't even know that much. I'd love to have you stay. I want you to stay more than I want anything else in the world."

"Then why——"

"Oh, Bob, you know why! You know you can't do that to Zoe! You know I can't do that to Zoe. She's your wife. She loves you and you love her. And she's befriended me. She's built me up. She's made it possible for me to be and do everything I've been and done in Washington. I can't betray her, any more than you can."

"She's left me, Beverley. She didn't say anything at all about coming back this time. I'm sure she's never coming back any more. She's left me for months on end for years now. And I've never been unfaithful to her yet."

"Then if you've never been unfaithful to her yet, there's all the more reason why you shouldn't be unfaithful to her now. I think she will come back. I tell you I think she cares about you still. And if she did come back, if you found out she did care about you still, you'd be terribly sorry that you'd let go, after you've put up this good fight for so long."

"I'm glad you realize it's been a fight. She doesn't seem to."

"Of course I realize it. But you're not going to give up, are you, after you've fought all this time?"

"Yes, I am. That's exactly what I'm going to do. I can't fight any longer. I'm too lonely and too depressed. Don't send me away, Beverley. Don't send me off to someone I don't know and don't trust and don't respect."

"You won't respect me, Bob, any more, or trust me either, if I let you stay here."

"Yes, I will. I'll always trust you. I'll always respect you. And I'll be everlastingly grateful to you. For being kind. For understanding. For helping. You will be kind, won't you, Beverley? You do understand. You must help."

There was no reason why he should feel guilty about it. He told himself that, over and over again. There was no reason why Beverley should feel guilty about it. He told her that, too. And he meant it. He had spoken the truth when he said he wouldn't stop trusting her, or respecting her. He trusted her implicitly, he respected her immeasurably. But still something was different. He wasn't at ease any more, except with Beverley. He didn't want to see his father or his mother or Helen. That was why he had tried to steer Helen off when she suggested coming to see him, why he

behaved like a fool when she did come, drinking three cocktails at lunch time, and scolding her about her own money and telling her smutty stories. He and Helen had always been extraordinarily close to each other and now he wasn't close to her any more because for the first time he couldn't take her into his confidence. Neither did he want to see Ronnie and Welby, who had put up such a splendid fight and won out in the end, instead of giving up in the end, the way he had; it made him ashamed to see them. He didn't even want to see his own crowd, his and Beverley's. He didn't want them to guess what had happened and he thought they might, that it would show somehow. Of course, there had been joking references to Beverley as his girl for a long time. But they were just jokes. Nobody believed she was his girl, not in that way. Beverley had always run straight, just as Zoe had always run straight. She wasn't cheap or common. He'd never seen her take a single drink too many or let any man get fresh with her or so much as say a word that was off-colour. She'd been as good a girl as he'd ever known. She was still as good a girl as he'd ever known. He'd knock the head off anyone who said she wasn't. But he didn't want to give anyone a chance to say she wasn't.

Of course there had been no question of staying just one night. He had believed that there was, when he asked if he might do it, but afterwards it was clear to him that Beverley had known from the beginning what it really would be like, for she showed no surprise and no resentment the next time he stayed, which he did without even asking for permission. She was very good to him. It was infinitely comforting and infinitely sustaining to stay with Beverley. She did not emanate radiance, and there was none of the exultation over a supreme conquest, none of the conviction that in this union was achieved the ultimate rapture of a lifetime, as there had been with Zoe; neither was there the same insatiable desire to test, over and over again, the seeming infallibility of a wellspring which was the fountainhead of all conceivable ecstasy. But there was a consciousness of kindness and understanding and sympathy which meant more than anything else in the world could have meant just then. Having once tacitly admitted that his need of her was greater than the obstacles which should have barred its fulfilment, Beverley accepted his possession of her without reservation or reproach of any kind. She was always sweet, always docile, always reasonable and responsive and undemanding when he came to her. Her work at the office, and her attitude towards him there, were both untinged by any indication that there was the slightest change in their relationship; and if she did not see him, for a week at a time, outside of office hours, she never asked him why she had not done so or where he had been, nor was her welcome of him any less warm when he did come. She always conveyed the impression that she was glad to see him, if he were free, but never that she

expected him to give up, for her sake, any pleasurable experience in which she could not share. The very fact that she forbore from implying that she should be, or could be, essential to him in any way, endeared her to him increasingly.

On only one occasion did anything happen to mar the serenity of their association. After Bert had been with the news bureau for a year, he brought up the subject of a raise. His request seemed to Bob logical, and there was no reason, financially, why it should not be granted; the bureau was increasingly prosperous, and no small part of its prosperity was due to Bert. But this was true of Beverley also, and Beverley had not received a raise in two years. After his conversation with Bert on the subject of a salary had come to a conclusion that was mutually satisfactory, Bob asked him to send Beverley along in, too. When she entered the inner office, and stood quietly beside his desk, waiting for him to speak to her, he reached over and took her hand.

"I've got some news for you, kid. You're going to have a raise."

"A raise! What for?"

"Well, I want you to have it. I think you deserve it. As a matter of fact, I think you ought to have twice what you're getting. You're doing twice as much as you used to."

She drew away her hand and went out of his office without answering. A little later, when he went out to look for her, still blissfully unconscious of the construction she had put on his words, Bert told him that she had gone home, and that apparently she was not feeling very well.

"Probably a mild touch of the flu," Bert said casually. "Everyone's having the flu these days. I thought I felt it coming on myself, but when you told me I could have a raise, that acted as a quick cure. Why don't you offer Beverley a raise? I bet that would be good for what ails her, too."

"I did offer her a raise. That's why I asked you to send her along in—so she could have one at the same time you did. I thought she deserved one just as much as you."

"There's no possible argument about that. Well, perhaps she's collapsed from joy. There's never any telling what a girl will do when she's pleased, any more than there's any telling what she'll do when she's mad."

Bert lounged away again, and Bob did not give the matter much more thought himself. But when he went around to Beverley's apartment that evening, after an early dinner with the Vice-President's secretary, he knew, the minute she opened the door for him, that something was very much amiss. She was still wearing her tailored office clothes, instead of having on a soft house dress, and clearly she had been crying.

"Why, Beverley, what's the matter?" he asked in concern. He never spoke to her irritably or angrily, the way he had spoken so

often to Zoe, because Beverley never made him feel irritable or angry. "Are you sick? Are you unhappy about something?"

"I'm not sick. But I am terribly unhappy. Oh Bob, you must have known that I didn't expect—that I wouldn't accept——"

"My dear girl, I haven't the least idea what you're talking about."

"You offered me a raise today. That is, you called it a raise. But at the same time you said I ought to have twice as much as I'd been getting, because——"

Belatedly, but suddenly, he saw. He knew better than to try to touch her then. But he spoke to her with greater gentleness and affection than ever before,

"I'm very sorry, Beverley. I didn't realize how it sounded or I wouldn't have said it. Please believe me. Bert had just asked for a raise and I'd given it to him. I thought if he had one, you ought to have one, too, for the same reasons. I still think so. But I never thought—— I know there isn't a girl in the world who's ever done what you've done more single-heartedly. I know it was only because you were sorry for me."

"It wasn't only because I was sorry for you. I was sorry for you. But no matter how sorry I'd been, I wouldn't have done it unless I'd cared, too."

From the beginning, they had both fought shy of the word "love." But Beverley might as well have used it now. Bob had known for a long time that she loved him.

"And it's because I care that I can't bear to have you offer me money. I don't need much of any money. That is, I don't need much of any for myself. I have thought, sometimes, that if I could only have a nicer apartment, it would be pleasanter for you. A shiny new one with chromium plate and Venetian blinds and modern age furniture. This is so dingy and drab for you to come to at the end of a day's work. Zoe made everything beautiful for you."

"She made everything beautiful for a little while. That's why it all seemed so much worse when it went blank. You'd never let anything go blank. I forget that this place is dingy and drab when I'm with you, Beverley, because you're always so sweet and cordial and merry yourself. Besides, you have improved it a lot. But if you want an apartment like that, why don't you let me give you the raise, just as I'd planned, and use the extra money to rent a——"

"Oh Bob, don't! I'd feel—I'd feel like a kept woman if I did that."

"Beverley dear, I'm not going to give you an extra cent if it's going to make you unhappy to have me do it. But at the same time, I'm afraid you're not saving very much. I'm afraid that sooner or later you'll need extra money and not have any. I'm afraid——"

"If you're going to start being afraid, Bob, we'll—we'll have to stop, that's all. Think of all the things we could have been afraid

of—like getting found out, for instance, accidentally, or—well, for any number of reasons. But you weren't afraid at first."

"No, I wasn't afraid, because I was desperate. But I've been very selfish, Beverley. I've taken everything and not given anything in return."

"Hush! You've given me——"

She could not say "your love," because she knew he had never given that to anyone but Zoe; there had been no pretence. She could not say "yourself," because it was she who had been prodigal, not he; there had always been boundaries to the part of his life which he shared with her. Momentarily she groped for a word which would be both accurate and adequate. She ended rather haltingly.

"——the sense of being needed and wanted, Bob. That means a lot to any girl. So much that incidentally you've given me happiness, too."

"Well, I certainly did want you and need you the worst way. I certainly want you and need you still."

Now, he thought, he might touch her. He had always been very gentle with her. There had never been any of that importunity with which he had forced his passion on Zoe, in dealing with Beverley. He had never been driven to it, either by his own feelings or by Beverley's attitude. But for the first time, he saw that though she would not deny him, her heart would still be withdrawn from him, and he knew he could not take her like that.

"It's later than I thought. You ought to be getting some sleep," he said soothingly. "I'm sorry you've had this bad evening. But I'll make it up to you. It'll be all right if I come back tomorrow, won't it?"

It was all right when he went back the next night, but in the meantime he had done a great deal of straight and sober thinking. They could not go on forever this way. Beverley must have definite security, both for the present and the future, and a position in regard to himself that could be recognized and regularized. He did not see very clearly how this could be brought about, though he believed that it should be. He did not think Zoe would refuse to divorce him, if he asked her to do so, but the fact remained that he did not want to be divorced from her. He had never desired any other woman for his wife, and he knew he would think of her as his wife until the end of time. But increasingly, resentment against her welled up within him. If she had not belittled him and derided him and neglected him, he would never have been left hungering for human companionship and compassion, he would never have been trapped, or let Beverley get trapped, in the blind alley which they had now reached. As he grew more and more baffled and bewildered and angry and ashamed, the more he blamed Zoe for his entanglement. The more he longed for an excuse to hurt her

and humiliate her as she had hurt and humiliated him. But it did him no good to seek for such a pretext when she was on the other side of the world. He could be avenged on her only if he could see her and shout at her and strike at her. Then, when he had poured all this venom out of his system, when he was clear of it and clean again, somehow the way to go on would be revealed—a way in which Beverley would be protected, and Zoe, having been punished, would be recaptured.

It was while he was trying to figure out what this way would be, that Zoe unexpectedly came back, and that he heard she had come back with Giles Arnold and verified the information.

Beverley screwed her lipstick back into place, and tilted her pointed hat to an angle better calculated to set off the effect of the long red feather. She thought it was just right when Bob came into the room.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," he said. The brevity with which he spoke was characteristic, and so was the courtesy; he had never yet been rude to Beverley. "My sister's been in my office. That's what delayed me."

"Yes. She came in here, too. I think she expected to find Bert, and that she was rather surprised to find me instead. I was surprised that she did, too. She caught me rather off guard. I'm afraid I spoke to her rather flippantly, in my effort to seem casual."

"Don't let that worry you. Helen is the last person in the world to take offence when there isn't any intended."

"I wasn't afraid she'd take offence. But I am afraid I've roused her suspicions, in trying to do just the opposite."

"Well, don't let that worry you too much either. Helen's a good deal more level-headed than she looks. The fact that her suspicions were roused wouldn't mean that she'd begin to shout them through a megaphone."

"No. She wouldn't do that. But I'd feel badly to have her suspicious of me. She's so unspoiled. I can't imagine her being connected with anything that's sordid. I've always thought Zoe's nickname for her was appropriate. I know some people think it's silly. But she is the personification of sweetness, isn't she?"

"Yes—— Do you feel what we've done is sordid, Beverley?"

"I didn't at first. In fact, I didn't for a long while. But after Zoe came home this last time——"

"Did you feel differently then?"

"Yes. I may be absolutely mistaken. But I got the idea that when Zoe came home this last time, she wanted very much to stay. That she hoped, somehow, you and she could find some kind of a common meeting ground and get together again."

"You're not mistaken. That's what she did hope."

"Well, of course, that would change everything, wouldn't it,

Bob? Because, when you came to me it was because Zoe had left you, because you were lonely. And now that she's come back, that you can have her again——"

"She came back, but I wouldn't let her stay. I sent her away. It isn't generally known yet, but it will be in a day or two. She's gone back to Europe—for an indefinite period in undetermined territory."

The sentence trailed away, formlessly. Bob stood looking away from Beverley, at nothing in particular. She saw he had completely forgotten that when he came into the room, it had been for the purpose of taking her out to dinner with him. She knew that something dreadful had happened, though she still did not know what it was.

"You didn't send her away because of me, did you, Bob? Because that would be terrible. It's Zoe you really care for, I've always known that."

"No, I didn't send her away because of you. I sent her away because I'd been told she came here to be with Captain Arnold, and I believed it. I don't know whether you ever heard—he wanted very much to marry her once, and it was just a toss-up which one of us she would take. She decided in favour of me because she thought he had let her down, on a point that mattered a good deal to her, and that I never would. That sounds queer now, doesn't it? But it's true. She was more in love with him than she was with me though—it was only afterwards that she—well, that she felt the same way about me that I did about her. So I was jealous of him from the beginning, and in a way I never got over it. I suppose it was partly an inferiority complex. He had everything to offer her that I hadn't, and I couldn't forget it. I still kept right on being jealous of him. I was so jealous of him even this last week that I'd gladly have killed him if I could've got my hands on him."

"And you told her that?"

"Not exactly. I told her that if she didn't leave Washington within twenty-four hours I'd sue her for divorce and name him as co-respondent."

"Why, Bob, you couldn't have! Not after what we've done."

"Well, I did. She doesn't know what we've done. She was suspicious of us before she went to South America, when there was no reason why she should be. I've never seen any point in telling you before, but we had a dreadful quarrel about you then. I said some pretty harsh things to her, and in the course of them drove home the truth that she was evil-minded and unfair. She hated me for it, but I convinced her just the same. I convinced her so thoroughly, that the conviction's lasted; since she has had cause for suspicion, she's never doubted me. We quarrelled after she got home, but not because she thought I'd been unfaithful to her. If she had, of course she'd have come back at me by saying that if I brought suit

against her, naming Giles as a co-respondent, she'd bring a counter suit, naming you as a co-respondent. It didn't enter her mind how simple it would have been for her to do that. For which I'm very thankful, on your account."

"Bob, everything you're saying makes all this seem worse and worse. I don't see how you could have——"

"Beverley, would you mind not saying that again? Helen's just been telling me that there are a lot of other things I couldn't have done, and, as a matter of fact, I've done them all. Do you remember there was another night, the first of the week, that I was late when I'd asked you to go out to dinner with me? Well, the reason I was late was because I was up in Zoe's room, shaking her and calling her a liar and worse and telling her to clear out before I dragged her name in the dust and ruined the career of a man who'd never done me the slightest harm, and who, as it turns out, now wants to marry my sister."

He did not stop because Beverley had interrupted him by speaking to him. She had not said a word. But the horror and incredulity which he had seen an hour before in Helen's face were nothing compared to the horror and incredulity that he saw in Beverley's now. It was worse than if she had actually blurted out, "So that's what you called your wife. That's what you've done to her. I've lived with you for nearly two years and I've thought all this time that you were kindly and courteous and gentle. I've believed you when you've said I hadn't forfeited your confidence or your respect. But I have lived a lie, I have allowed you—— What would you call me if you ever got angry with me? What would you do to me?" He could not tell her he would never insult her or abuse her, as he had insulted and abused Zoe, because his feeling for her was not sufficiently strong to result in abuse and insult. That would only make a bad matter worse. But he saw that fear had leapt into her eyes, and that she was shrinking away from him. He put out his hands almost pleadingly.

"Please don't look at me like that, Beverley. I can't bear it. You're all I have left. If I can't depend on you——"

"If you can't depend on me! But how can I depend on *you*?"

"You've never found me undependable so far, have you? I've done everything for you that you'd let me. I'm ready and eager to do a lot more. I'd be very glad to marry you, if you'd let me. Because I know what Zoe'll do now. She'll stay away until after Giles has come up for selection, and then she'll divorce me for cruel and abusive treatment. She wouldn't be human if she did anything else. And after she's done that, you and I can be married."

"Oh, Bob, will you please *stop*!"

She was not crying. It was not like the night when he had offered her a raise, and she had misunderstood him; then she had cried and cried, and finally sent him away from her, disconsolate him-

self. She was dry-eyed now and determined. The docility which had meant so much to him was all gone. Her words came crisply, with no indication of yielding or even of compromise.

"Where is Zoe, Bob?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!"

"No, I swear I don't. She left here with a reservation at the Plaza. But she cancelled that when she got to Baltimore. We've tried to reach her at every other hotel we could think of in New York. And we've seen the passenger list of every eastbound transatlantic ship sailing this week. We know she did sail, because Helen had a radiogram. But that didn't give us any sort of a clue."

"Never mind. You'll have to start out after her."

"How can I? What good would that do?"

"It's your one chance. If she knows you've made a desperate effort to find her she'll believe you wanted her back. Of course you'll have to tell her about me, and it would take her a while to get over that."

"I can't tell her about you. If there's any kind of a filthy cad I never could abide it's the sneak who kisses and tells, and this is a good deal more than a question of kisses."

"That's exactly why you've got to tell her. You've got to come clean, Bob, or you can't come at all. You'll know that when you've turned it over in your mind, and I know it already. You mustn't worry about that part. Zoe won't spread it around; any more than Helen would. But she has a right to the truth."

"It's just like you to look at it that way, Beverley. But even if I could too, there's the bureau——"

"Forget about the bureau. I'll stay here and help Bert run it. We'll keep it going. Forget about me. I'll manage. I've had an offer of a job in Cincinnati, a good one. I'm going to take it. But not now. Not until—— I know it'll be kept open for me, Bob. I'm not lying to you. I'll show you the letter if you like."

"Beverley, you know I can't let you do that."

"I know you can't keep me from doing that. If you don't go after Zoe I'll resign right away. Now, this minute. I'll be on my way to Cincinnati before tomorrow morning. But if you'll go to Europe I'll stick until you get back. I don't suppose it'll do any good for you to ask Zoe to forgive you, but at least you can tell her you're sorry. I don't suppose it'll do any good to ask her to come home with you, but at least you can tell her that it would mean more than anything else in the world to you if she would. Then if she sends you away you can't help it. I think probably she will. I'm sure I would if I were in her place. But after you've gone she'll think of you differently than she has for a long time. And, by and by, perhaps something will happen that will bring her back to you after all."

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Bob reached Hunter's Green on Sunday and went first to the little transformed schoolhouse which was now Helen's headquarters, he found this apparently deserted. Having knocked several times without getting any answer, he went on to the big house, where Pearl Gray opened the door for him, with the air of one who had been lying in wait for an expected arrival.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Bob. Ah sho'ly is glad to see you. Let me rest your wraps. Didn't Miss Zoe come with you?"

"No, Pearl, not this time."

"She ain't took sick or nothin', has she?"

"No, she isn't sick," he said, seized with sudden terror lest she might be, that he would not know about it and that no one would take care of her.

"You don't think Miss Zoe done forgot Opal and Zally and me, does you, Mr. Bob?"

"Of course she hasn't forgotten you. What makes you say such a thing?"

"Well, Mr. Bob, when Miss Zoe was here to Mr. Dabney's barn dance, she done say she was fixin' to go back to her own house. Yassuh. She done say when she did, Opal and Zally and me could come back too. She done say she'd let me know. An' I ain't heard nothin' from her since she done left here."

"I'm very sorry, Pearl. Miss Zoe had to go back to Europe unexpectedly. She left in a hurry. I'm afraid she must have forgotten to write you."

"Miss Zoe don't never forget nothin', Mr. Bob. Must be she don't want us no mo'."

"I'm certain she wants you if she told you so. But you know how busy she always is. She just didn't have time to write. You'll surely get a letter later on, though. Let me know when you do, will you? I'd like to hear what she says to you about arrangements."

He tried to make his voice sound casual. Pearl Gray's face, which had been troubled and gloomy, gradually began to brighten.

"Well, Ah sho'ly am glad to think there ain't nothin' but a little delay, Mr. Bob. 'Case Opal and Zally and me, we is all hanker-in' to get back to Miss Zoe. Not that Miss Ronnie and Miss Helen ain't treated us right, and that this ain't a fine place. But when you get used to one lady's ways, 'specially if it's a lady like Miss Zoe, there ain't no other seems quite the same to you. She am the only one Ah's ever seed that could get clean corners and

light biscuit outen the same nigger. Yassuh. Ah respects her for it, even if Ah is the nigger and has to do the work. An' Miss Ronnie done told us it'd be all right for us to leave soon as Miss Zoe needed us. Miss Ronnie ain't aimin' to take no mo' bo'ders, so she don't need so much help no mo'. Of co'se she didn't call 'em bo'ders, she called 'em payin' guests lak she allus does. But you know as well as Ah does, Mr. Bob, that company is company and bo'ders is bo'ders."

"Well, I'm company today, Pearl, but there doesn't seem to be anyone here to welcome me. Where is everyone?"

"Miss Ronnie, she done gone to church and taken Bennie with her. But she 'lowed as how she'd be back befo' she and Mr. Welby started for the milk punch party at Todd Hollow. Mr. Welby, he's out in the colt stable. Does you know he can drive a cyar real good now, Mr. Bob? He drives all 'round the place, lickety split, in a cute little cyar that's been rigged up a purpose for him. But now he don't need a shofer no mo', and Zally aint' got much to do 'ceptin' the work in the gyarden. Zally ain't got green thumbs; he ain't never pretended he had. Of co'se he don't mind a nice little flower patch, like you and Miss Zoe has in Alexandria; but no one could never call this here gyarden a patch. It's one of the biggest gyardens in Virginia, and it ain't got jest flowers in it neithet; it's got so many vegetables it's done take my appetite away to count 'em, and that's a fact, Mr. Bob. Yassuh. But still Miss Ronnie, she wants mo' and mo' in it all the time. She wants green peas and string beans and carrots and spinach every day. Bennie hates spinach, jes' lak all chillun does, so one day Zally done told Miss Ronnie there weren't no mo', that the rabbits had et it all up. And she was powerful provoked. She said if he'd had any sense he'd have planted enough spinach for Bennie and the rabbits too. At least that was what she meant. And Zally, he ain't no gyardener, he am a shofer, and he wants to get back to shoferin' you and Miss Zoe to the White House and them litigations in Washington. He done make frens with lots of other shofers, and he misses 'em. They all has their little debts and their little secrets, and they used to tell each other the news about their bosses and their misses, and have 'em a little game of craps now and again, and sit in each others cyars when it was cold and listen to the radio. An' now Zally ain't got nothin' to do but plant spinach."

"I'm sorry, Pearl, but I'm sure you'll hear from Miss Zoe before long, just as I told you. Did Miss Helen go to church, too? I expected to find her waiting for me. I said I'd be down today."

"No, Miss Helen, she done went over to Todd Hollow last night. Mr. Dabney, he done come and fetch her in his cyar. I reckon there was mo' than one party goin' on. She done told me to say, if you got here befo' she come back, that the Taliaferros hoped you'd come right along over to Todd Hollow yo'self. Yassuh. But she

wasn't rightly lookin' for you befo' evenin'. She didn't know for sure whether you'd come at all."

"I don't think I want to go to Todd Hollow, Pearl. But it doesn't matter. I'll walk out to the colt stable and see if I can find Mr. Welby there."

Spring seemed to be very early. The hunting season would not be over, normally, for several weeks yet, and the clear weather which was the sportsman's delight had held steadily all winter. But within the last few days there had been a sudden break in it, and now it was really hot in the sun. The trees had all taken on a vaguely fuzzy look; the willows were feathery and unbelievably soon the orchards would be a mass of white blossoms. Bob remembered that when he and Zoe were driving down to Dabney's dance, before they began to quarrel, Zoe had said she wanted to see the Shenandoah Valley through the different stages of its bloom that year: first, the wild cherry and the wild pear, vagrant and fragile and barren and intermingled with redbud, on the fringes of forests and in deserted dooryards; and then later the ordered profusion of apple trees, acre after acre in promising full-blown loveliness. She had even spoken of week-end trips in which they would vary their route, taking the Valley Pike all the way from Winchester to Lexington, or going over the Skyline Drive and coming out at Charlottesville. Nothing in Normandy, she was sure, could surpass that, and she had never seen it. Well, it would be a long time before she saw it now, or he saw it with her. Even when or if she did come back to the United States, there would be no light-hearted projects for junketing with him in the springtime—

He found Welby seated in the trim little office at the right of the main entrance to the colt stable, talking with one of the grooms, a cheerful freckled boy with a cockney accent who kept saying, "Thank you, sir." Welby hailed Bob heartily, finished what he was saying to the groom, and dismissed the boy without curtness. Then he gave Bob a more extended welcome.

"I certainly am glad to see you. Helen said you might be down today, but she was rather vague about it, so we all went ahead with our own plans. Ronnie'll be back any moment now, though. Won't you drive over to the Taliaferros with us?"

"Thanks. Pearl Gray said they'd asked me to, and that Helen had left a message. But, if it's all the same to you, I don't believe I will today. I'm not in the mood for a party. I do want to see Helen, though. So I'll hang around here until you all get back, if that won't put anyone out."

"Of course it won't put anyone out. But it doesn't sound to me like an especially cheerful way of spending a spring Sunday."

"I'm not feeling especially cheerful."

"I reckon we all have those times. I know I've had plenty. Is there anything——"

"No. Yes, there is, too. Listen, Welby. Don't send me a cheque this next quarter. I don't feel I have a right to any of the revenue from the stock farm any more."

"Zoe's already told me she thought we ought to give up the fifty-fifty division. That is, if you agreed it was all right for Ronnie and me to keep three-fourths of the net profits from now on. I've been meaning to write you about it, but I didn't get around to it this last week. I think maybe we are entitled to three-fourths now. But I certainly don't think we're entitled to any more than that."

"Very well. But send all of the other fourth to Zoe. Don't send an eighth to her and an eighth to me."

"Where shall I send her money?"

"I don't know. Helen must have given you a hint how things are. But I've got a forlorn hope Zoe may write and tell you where she'd like money sent. If she does, perhaps it won't be in such a way that you'd feel it a breach of confidence to pass the information along to me."

"I see. All right, Bob."

Welby made no further comments and asked no questions whatsoever. Bob began to wonder, as they sat talking about inconsequential things, why he had been such a fool that he'd never thought of turning to Welby long before. If he had only done that instead of turning towards Beverley—— If he had only come to the country, and found fellowship with another man, instead of staying in the city and getting gratification out of a woman. Or even if he had stayed in the city—— There was Bert, who always had a good story up his sleeve, and whose unconcerned ways of meeting life were an antidote from an angry and rebellious attitude; yet he had never made an intimate of Bert. There was his father, who yearned, much of the time so vainly, for his only son's companionship, and who, lacking in worldly wisdom as he would always remain, could still set an example of patience and rectitude any son might be proud to follow. Well, it had been just one more stupid and hateful mistake, and now it was too late to do anything about it. At least, he took it for granted that it was.

But Welby did not seem to think that it was. When Ronnie came in a few minutes later with Bennie, Welby asked her if she would mind running along to Todd Hollow without him. It was so long since he had seen Bob, he said, that he would much rather sit around at home and talk than get mixed up with a noisy crowd, which he could do any time. Ronnie, greeting Bob cordially and unrepentantly herself, agreed that this was a fine idea. She did not assume an air of injury, intimating that her husband was churlish and disobliging about going to parties with her, nor did she insist on staying at home herself, intruding on a masculine meeting of minds. Instead she said she would make it snappy, and pass along the good news to Helen that Bob had already arrived. Then

she jumped into her car and drove off, waving her hand gaily as she disappeared from sight. Bob was somewhat dismayed to find Bennie left behind, for he had always thought of Bennie as an obstreperous and troublesome child. But Bennie apparently not only adored his father, but stood in wholesome awe of him. He settled down in a corner of the office and drew pictures, occasionally making a sucking sound through the gap in his mouth where the two front teeth were now missing and every now and then proudly bringing the products of his labours for the two men to admire. And when Welby eventually suggested that they should all go up to the house, and the freckled groom reappeared to help him into his car, Bennie seemed to take it for granted that he himself should escort Bob over the fields and lawns, and generally take upon himself the duties of a host until his father could resume these. He slipped a warm, if somewhat grubby, hand spontaneously into Bob's and conversed with him engagingly.

"I'm going to Mexico with my Aunt Helen," he said. "On a big white boat. We're going to New York first. She's going to take me to the Aquarium. Have you ever been to the Aquarium, Mr. Morton?"

Bob admitted his lack of familiarity with this landmark.

"She's going to take me up inside the Statue of Liberty, too," Bennie went on, "and on top of the Empire State Building. We're going to have our dinner there, ice-cream and everything. It'll be swell. I think my Aunt Helen's a very nice lady, don't you?"

Bob agreed that he did.

"And on board the ship, she says I'll learn a lot about nav—about naut—about how it runs, you know."

"Navigation? Nautical terms?" suggested Bob.

"Yes. And in Mexico I'm going to learn all sorts of things. And have fun, too. It's lucky for me I'm going to have a little sister. I don't suppose Mummy and Daddy would have let me go if it hadn't been that this sister is coming along and they want me out of the way. Did you know I was going to have a little sister, Mr. Morton?"

"I heard something about it," Bob replied, regarding Bennie with increasing interest.

"It might be a brother though. Daddy says you can't tell beforehand, any more than you can with a foal or a puppy or a calf. There are fillies and bitches and heifers, and then, on the other hand, there are colts and dogs and bulls. It's the same way with babies. Probably you knew that though."

"Yes, I knew that."

"Then by and by they grow up and afterwards they are fathers or mothers, depending on which they were to start with. Daddy explained it all to me in one of our talks. We have a great many talks. Sometimes they are funny and sometimes they are serious.

In one of the serious talks Daddy also explained to me that it was very important to be gentle with mothers and make sure they did not get tired or troubled in any way. When they do, it is bad for the mother and it is bad for the baby, too. Whatever kind of a mother or baby you are dealing with, I mean. Brood mares and cows and ladies. Did you know that, too?"

"I'm afraid I don't know as much about that as your father does. It's a good thing your father's told you all this, Bennie."

"Yes, it is. Because of course now I can help him take great care of Mummy. And by and by I'm going to help Mummy take great care of the baby, too. She says I can give the baby its bath, if I will take one myself without fussing. I don't mind baths once in a while, but I think Mummy has them too much on her mind. I'd like to give the baby his though. Or hers. After I get back from Mexico. Did you ever go to Mexico, Mr. Morton?"

There were several phases of this conversation which made Bob wince a little, but he was fair enough to realize that this was not Bennie's fault, and he was curiously touched by the child's friendliness. Bennie had never shown himself so amicably disposed before, and in consequence, dinner was as tranquil as well as an intimate meal. Ronnie and Helen came back from Todd Hollow in good time, and there were no outsiders present, not even Dabney, which Bob divined was probably not wholly accidental, for he had never been at Hunter's Green before when Sunday dinner did not prove expansive. But he was grateful for the tact which had limited it, and for the easy way in which Ronnie and Welby seemed to take it for granted that he and Helen would rather be by themselves afterwards. They went over to the pleasantly remodelled schoolhouse, and Helen plunged at once into the subject uppermost in her brother's mind.

"I've been thinking a lot about you and Zoe, Bob, since I saw you Friday, and I've had two ideas that haven't occurred to you perhaps. You know the passenger lists are made up quite a few hours before a boat sails. So when people take boats at the last minute, their names don't appear on the first lists. But later on, after sailing, these lists are revised."

"We thought of that. We radioed every ship asking if there were a Zoe Wing or a Mrs. Robert Morton listed, and in every case we got back the answer that there wasn't."

"Well, she may have used an assumed name, or there may have been a misprint. You know how often continentals make mistakes in American names—or perhaps you don't. I think you ought to look over the passenger lists of all the boats that sailed this last week again, after the boats get back. I believe you'll find Zoe's name—or something that resembles Zoe's name—has been added to one of them."

"Well, that's a good idea, Helen, and I hadn't thought of it my-

self. Except that it would mean a delay before I got started. I've decided to leave right away. I've already applied for my passport and so on. I thought I could get off by the middle of the week."

"You don't need to wait. That nice little receptionist of yours, Mary Bethune—is that her name?—can look up the lists and cable you. If you take a boat going to France or England, so that you'd land midway on the map of Europe, then you can start north or south or east or west, without losing much time whichever direction you decide to take. You can fly."

"Yes, you have it doped out mighty well. What's the other idea?"

"Why, it was about that space on the inside of the front cover of a passport where you are supposed to write down your address in the United States and your banker's address and the name and address of the person who should be notified in case of death or accident. If Zoe had got a new passport, she probably wouldn't have bothered with those blanks—it isn't something you're required to do, like putting your signature at the bottom of the page devoted to the 'description of bearer' before the passport is handed over to you. It's only something you are advised to do: 'The bearer should fill in the blanks below as indicated.' But she didn't get a new passport. She had her old one extended. I telephoned Ambrose Estabrook yesterday to find out, and he was most co-operative about getting the information for me quickly."

"Good God, Helen! You haven't added the Under Secretary of State to your collection, have you?"

"I've always liked Ambrose Estabrook very much, Bob. He's an exceptionally nice man and apparently he's always liked me. He's a widower, you know, And he's very eligible in other ways, too, like——"

"Yes, I know all about that, but suppose we stick to our former subject. So you think that Zoe probably did have the blank filled in, because, when she got her old passport, she would've done it methodically and automatically. Well, you're probably right. You've got another good idea there. But that isn't going to help me out any unless——"

He could not bring himself to say, "Unless there is an accident, unless she is killed," though the obsession that something of this sort was going to happen was growing on him by leaps and bounds. Helen recognized his inability to go on, and did so, quickly, herself.

"She'll probably register with the nearest Consul, anyway, as soon as she gets to Europe. She always registered at the Consulate in every city we went to, when she and I were travelling together. If she does that this time, you can track her down very quickly, after you find out where she went first. You'll have had all this worry for nothing."

"She won't do that this time. She did it before, because she needed consular contacts in connection with her writing. But this time she isn't going to be writing. That's another thing we've found out since I saw you—that she went first to William Ruthven of the *Examiner*, and then to practically every editor in New York, and not one of them would give her a job."

"Well, I never did think much of editors," Helen remarked loftily. "And I think less than ever of them now, after what you've told me. But do stop worrying. Zoe'll write. She can't any more help writing than she can help breathing. And sooner or later someone will snap up what she writes, because it's good. It's always been good, and it's kept getting better and better all the time. Some day she'll write something that's unique, and then all those editors, who are nothing but a lot of 'silly sheep with no sense,' will start scrambling to see which one can get it first. I hope she keeps them all waiting a long time, and finally sells it to the one who can pay her the most and soaks him for it."

"Amen! But she may not dash off this masterpiece right away. In fact, I have a hunch she may not dash off anything, in spite of what you say. I think she may feel that even writing's futile and thankless, like everything else."

Bob's voice was suspiciously husky. He waited until it was under better control before he tried to go on. Then he looked at Helen appealingly.

"You wouldn't consider going with me, would you, sweetness? It would mean a lot to me if you would. We've always been such pals, until lately, and now we've grown away from each other, which is all my fault, of course. I've been such a damn fool. I don't want to talk about it, but I promise I'll behave from now on. And if we were travelling together and everything, I'd be willing to wait a week or two for you, if that would make any difference."

Helen shook her head. "I knew you were going to ask me to do that. And I knew I'd have to say 'no.' Not because you've been a damn fool. I'm sorry about that but it never would make any difference in my feeling for you. We've each got our own problem now though, and we've each got to work it out alone. That doesn't mean I'm not touched that you wanted me. And we haven't stopped being pals, underneath. But we won't be seeing each other again, will we, Bob, for a long time?"

They put their arms around each other, and clung together for a long time, as they had when they were children, frightened by a thunderstorm or by the formless fears of the night. Then Bob went out into the early spring dusk, from which the warmth had faded with the sunshine.

Bob was still in France when Mary's cable reached him. He had gone first, briefly, to England, spending a week-end at Star Hundred

when he found that no amount of fuming would galvanize anyone in the United Kingdom into action between Friday and Monday, and later conferring with the American Ambassador, Michael Trent, who was an old friend of his father, and whom he himself had known ever since he was a little boy. He did not want to say very much to anyone, but at least he was willing to talk to Trent in a guarded way, and Trent understood instantly, and promised the fullest possible co-operation, both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent. It would not be necessary, he said, for Bob's own name to enter into the matter in any way; he had only to tell his own consular force, and the consular forces of his colleagues on the Continent, that he himself would like to get in touch with Zoe Wing, which was perfectly true. He had enjoyed seeing her immensely, the year before. He could think of nothing that he would like better than to see her again. In fact, he had been expecting to hear from her that she would like to cover the coronation, and that she hoped he could help her facilitate arrangements for doing so. He knew she had a soft spot in her heart for the abdicated King, but after all, news was news. Very likely she might still approach him—— Oh, she wasn't writing any news stories just then? Well, that was rather a waste and a pity, wasn't it? Trent thought that inevitably she would begin to do so again before long.

Somewhat cheered, but still groping in the dark, Bob crossed the Channel, gratefully taking advantage of Guy Grenville's offer of hospitality at his pleasant house, surrounded by a large terraced garden, on the Rue de la Faisandrie in Paris. Guy was now Councillor of Embassy and extremely eligible in every way. Bob had a feeling that Guy's cordiality, though sincere, was not wholly disinterested, that he would not be in the least averse to having Bob send glowing reports to Helen about the distinction of his position, the elegance of its setting, and the favour he had found in both French and foreign official circles. Bob acted on this intuition willingly enough, for he had always liked Guy immensely, and passed on his impressions, which on the whole were pleasurable, in one of his frequent letters to his sister. At the same time he could not conscientiously bring himself to say anything to Guy which could be interpreted as definite encouragement.

"Helen's playing the field just now," he reiterated, in reply to Guy's courteous but adroit questioning. "You'll have to let her keep on doing it until she gets tired of it. Don't rush your fences. I should say you had just as good a chance as anyone, if that's any comfort to you."

"It isn't much. What's this rumour I keep hearing about Giles Arnold being a new entry in this already overcrowded field she's playing?"

"There seems to be some truth in it."

"And Ambrose Estabrook?"

"Well, I'm not so sure about that. But it might be so, at that."

Guy groaned, semi-seriously. There was no doubt about it, Bob reflected, this agreeable and aristocratic Englishman was very hard hit, and personally, he would rather have him for a brother-in-law than any of the others. But he could not take over Guy's problems on top of his own troubles, and Guy seemed wholly aware of this. He made it clear that he would be glad to be helpful, in any way that lay within his power, and that this power, through the authority vested in him, as well as through his own personality and connections, was considerable. He gave Bob the feeling of support and co-operation, while leaving him wholly unmolested; and before Bob was through running down possible clues in and around Paris, as embodied in Zoe's old haunts and identified by her old friends, Mary's cable came in.

"JOE MING ON PASSENGER LIST BATORY POLISH AMERICAN LINE HOME PORT GDYNIA"—the message ran—"PROTESTS COMING IN AT SUSPENSION WORLD KALEIDOSCOPE CAN'T YOU SEND US SOME PIECES YOURSELF GOOD LUCK." He took the cable to Guy, still feeling baffled.

"Where's Gdynia? I never heard of it."

"Why, that's the port that was artificially built when the Polish Corridor was created. A few years ago it was just a dirty little fishing village. Now it's a flourishing city of over a hundred thousand. It looks something like a contractor's dream come true. I never saw so much concrete in any one place in my life. The docks are all made of concrete and the streets and the apartment houses and the cafés. I'm not sure that the population isn't."

"Would Zoe be likely to stay there, do you think? Not that I can see any reason why she should have gone there in the first place, instead of coming to France."

"She may have had a hunch that something would happen around there sooner or later. Because it's bound to. But no—I shouldn't think she'd have stayed very long in Gdynia itself. More likely she'd have gone on to Warsaw and Cracow and Kiev and Moscow. Or else to Danzig and Königsberg and Riga. Or maybe to all of them. And after that to Stettin and Stockholm and——"

"Say, give me a map, will you? And a chance to write some of these names down. About half of them I never even heard of before, any more than I ever heard of Gdynia."

"That's the trouble with you Americans," Guy said good-humouredly. "You think Rome and the Riviera and the Swiss Alps make up this continent. Most of you never even take the trouble to get as far as Berlin or Madrid, let alone Budapest and Copenhagen and any number of other charming cities. Here's your map. I don't know whether Zoppot will show on it or not—probably not, it's so small. But you ought not to overlook its possibilities."

"What's Zoppot?"

"It's Danzig's seaside resort. It has a good beach and a big casino. It's still pretty early in the season for it, but just the same, I wouldn't pass it over. What do you say to sending out a flock of telegrams tonight, addressed to Zoe at the leading hotels in all these places, and signing them with my name? I can say I have a special mission to the north and that I hoped to catch a glimpse of her. Do you think that would be unsporting?"

"It may be unsporting, but I'd be terribly grateful if you'd do it. And I'll map out an itinerary from what you've told me and get on the move myself."

"Right you are. But look here, you're going to follow your secretary's suggestion, aren't you?"

"What, about writing pieces? How could I write European pieces? I don't know anything about Europe."

"You could learn. You can't help learning something, whether you set out to or not, whether you even want to or not, if you go to Moscow and Warsaw and Danzig and Stettin."

Guy appeared to hesitate briefly. Then he went on.

"Look here, I expect you'll think I'm barging in and all that, and it's the last thing on earth I want to do. But if you did know a little more about Europe—enough to write about it, enough to talk about it, that sort of thing, don't you know—wouldn't it be all to the good, as far as you and Zoe are concerned? It would give you a common interest, so to speak. And a common knowledge. Now when you and she write about Washington, you do it more or less as equals—she has the bulge on you in some ways, or did, until she got out of touch with it, and you have it on her in others. But you've never set foot out of the United States before, and Zoe's at home almost anywhere by this time. She has friends scattered all over the world. You've never worked like a beaver to learn a foreign language, while you were carrying a heavy lot of other work. Zoe's done it with both French and Spanish, and she's taken jolly good care not to forget the German she learned as a girl either. No wonder you've got an inferiority complex, as you call it. You ought to have. Why don't you make up your mind, right now, to go straight to Moscow and work your way west? If I hear anything helpful, I'll get in touch with you at once. You can always double on your tracks, or do a bit of skipping. And meanwhile you can start qualifying for a foreign correspondent yourself. You ought to do your first piece, as you call it, before you leave Paris. On the new Anglo-French Entente." Guy paused, chuckled, and added, "Since you go in for the light side in your column, you might tell the tale that's making the rounds in Paris right now. A titled compatriot of mine, who thinks she can paint, insisted on doing a portrait of the Premier, and he finally consented because of her husband's powerful position. But when Blum saw the finished portrait, he said with a deep sigh, '*L'entente coûte très cher!*'"

"You'll have to translate," Bob said irritably.

"Well, a free version would be, 'International understanding comes high!' Get yourself a pocket dictionary and a phrase book, my good man, if you won't do any more than that!"

"All right. What next after this damned entente? I don't see anything very funny about it."

"Well, there're a number of topics I might be able to help on if you'd let me. Come along now. Don't keep thinking of me as the Councillor of the British Embassy. Think of me as your future brother-in-law, which I'm jolly well going to be yet. You're one of the family already. You have got yourself into rather a mess. But you're going to muddle through in the end, just like a bloody Britisher."

It was still winter in Moscow when Bob reached there, and the snow, white and dazzling, blanketed the Red Square as he went crunching across it past the multi-coloured domes of St. Basil's Cathedral and seriate red rectangles of Lenin's tomb towards the tessellated walls and peaked turrets of the Kremlin. His guide was a young girl, slim and fair-haired, wearing her fur collar fastened close around her rosy face, and trudging sturdily along hour after hour at Bob's side. She took him, before the day was over, to three museums and four clinics and to the Marriage and Divorce Bureau, and everywhere, except in the museums, he saw publicly posted information concerning the conditions under which abortion was permitted and encouraged; in the evening she took him to a superb production of Tschaikowsky's "Queen of Spades" before she saw him safely on the *Red Arrow* bound for Leningrad. Bob thought of how Zoe would have drawn this girl guide out, what a wonderful story she would have written about her, and how much more thrilling it would have been than his own descriptions of the Torgin stores and the interviews with high officials which he wrote himself. But he went on typing, late at night, in a cold dreary room, and mailed his piece the next morning, before his inadequate breakfast.

He had not realized before that there were so many cold dreary rooms and so many inadequate breakfasts, not to speak of so many surly porters, and so many barren hours, so much difficulty about the exchange of money, such endless futile waiting for personages who promised to appear and then did not, in the life of a foreign correspondent. It had always seemed glamorous and easy to him before; now he found it was gruelling and hard and lonely, and remembered that Zoe had never once written or spoken about that part of her experiences. When he got to Danzig there was no snow, though it was cold and rainy and bleak; but the beauty of the buildings, and the warmth of the Goldwasser and the excellence of Lauterbach's food helped him to forget the penetrating chill of the

atmosphere. So did the illuminating and provocative conversation of the senator to whom the alert American Consul introduced him. Bob had the sensation of being an immature and stupid pupil, whose geography teacher had lost patience with him, as this senator propelled him towards a seat at an enormous table where an atlas—four times the size of the one Guy had shown him—was spread out. But when the portly functionary opened their conference by bellowing, "Do you see where Danzig is? And Königsberg? And Stettin? Now I ask you, Herr Morton, is it not inconceivable that we Germans should longer tolerate this cleavage in our country made by the Polish Corridor?"—then he began to know that he was on the track of a story. His question, almost quixotic under the circumstances, as to whether any of the information imparted to him was confidential, was received with shouts of derision. "You are a journalist, Herr Morton? Write by all means then what I have told you for the American press. But no one will believe it or even read it with attention. No one will publish it unless you have your own channels of distribution. Three or four years from now perhaps. But this year, '37, bah!"

Bob turned this conversation over in his mind as he made the tour of the harbour, on the small governmental launch which was put at his disposal with persistent politeness. The local government seemed bent, not on keeping him from getting the drift of local activities and local opinions, but on ramming these down his throat. The *Fabrik* where anti-aircraft weapons were under manufacture, the plant working twenty-four hours a day, and the pleasant-looking guarded island where no one was allowed to land because secret experiments were being made there, were pointed out to him with special pride. He described this *Rund Reise* of the harbour, as well as the belligerent programme for closing the Corridor, outlined by the shouting senator, in some detail when he wrote his piece. But the senator had been right. Apparently no one in the United States felt much interest in Danzig. He had no fan mail on the article at all. But Bert and Mary both wrote him that most of his stuff was going over in a big way, and Bert added that he hadn't supposed the boss had it in him. What he was writing was the cat's whiskers.

Bob did not forget about Zoppot. But the casino had not yet opened for the summer, the beach was barren, the waves cold and grey. He found no trace of Zoe at the small second-rate hotels which were the only ones receiving guests so early in the year. Evidently he had lost time in going to Russia and Poland, for she had not registered at any hotel that he tried, and though he did find her name—as Zoe Wing, not as Mrs. Robert Morton—on the books of the Deutsches Haus in Danzig, she had been there only a few days; after that, space seemed to have swallowed her up. She

had not been to the American Consulate in either Danzig or Stettin, the American Embassy in Berlin had heard nothing from her, and none of Guy's telegrams or Michael Trent's guarded inquiries had brought forth results. There was nothing to do but struggle and stumble along, thankful for the unexpected work that kept him keyed to intensive, productive effort and hoping that sooner or later he would come across some clue.

He was back in Paris, staying with Guy again, when he found the first one. The library was, to him, the pleasantest room in the house on the Rue de la Faisandrie; he had still not learned to feel at ease in stiff continental salons, to admire needlepoint and gilt furniture, or to concede that cupids added anything to the adornment of a ceiling. But with the amount of space at his command, Guy had been able to save one portion of his quarters from French *decor*, to make it mellow and luxurious as well. There was ancient unpainted panelling on the walls beneath the open bookshelves, and huge upholstered chairs were interspersed among the more formal pieces. A great table ran down the middle of the room, and though its legs and edges were ornately carved, the centre was smooth and served as the background for every imaginable periodical. These periodicals were laid out in rows, neatly but without rigidity; they seemed to invite the hesitating reader to pick and choose among them, to keep them close or toss them away, according to his mood. Bob, running through them late one Sunday morning with the practised hand of one who can tell what he wants in the way of reading material almost by the feel of it, came across a small English weekly, which was unfamiliar to him, and settled down with it.

Its make-up was attractive, if unremarkable, and he turned over the leaves idly at first, pausing only long enough to look at an illustration here or read a paragraph there. Then suddenly his attention was caught by the title "Deserted Dooryard." He read a few lines, looked back at the title a second time, turned four pages, and saw an announcement that appeared as a footnote at the end of the story: "The editors feel privileged to announce that a companion piece to 'Deserted Dooryard,' entitled 'Cherished Orchard' will appear in the next number of the *Observer*. The author of these exquisite sketches is a young American who prefers to remain anonymous."

He jumped up and rushed down the corridor to Guy's bedroom, the magazine clutched in his hand, and burst in upon his host, who was dressing, at his leisure, for a luncheon in honour of the Mayor of New York, who had come to attend the opening of the Paris Exposition, and glean ideas for a bigger and better exposition which he meant to promote himself. Bob's state of excitement was such that it did not occur to him his entrance might have been in the least inopportune.

"Guy! I've found a story by Zoe! In an English magazine! That is, it isn't signed by her name, but I know she wrote it." In words that came tumbling out one after another, he explained that Zoe had wanted to go with him through the Shenandoah Valley during the different stages of spring bloom, that she had spoken of the varying aspects of wild cherry blossoms and nurtured apple blossoms and the symbolism of each. "You see, these wild cherries don't bear fruit any more. You find them by abandoned houses. They're pretty to look at, in a frail unsymmetrical way; but they haven't the loveliness of apple trees that are smooth and rounded and laden with promise, stretching out on every side of a homestead that's been safeguarded for generations. Now she's written this story about a girl who's like the wild cherry. She was thinking of herself, Guy, when she wrote that story. It isn't bitter but it's terribly sad. And when she wrote the other one, the one that's coming out next, I'm sure she was thinking of Ronnie. You read this and see if you don't think I'm right!"

Guy took the magazine that Bob thrust towards him, sat down in an easy-chair, and read the story through, while Bob paced up and down the room, helping himself to the contents of a convenient decanter and smoking one cigarette after another. Guy did not keep him waiting long.

"I say, I believe you're right. This has the same sort of expression, the same sort of underlying feeling, as 'Indian Plantain' and 'The White Mantilla' and 'The Imprisoned Water Sprite.' Only it's a much finer piece of work. It's a work of genius, very moving indeed. In fact, it's beautiful almost beyond belief."

"I'm going to take the next plane to London. I'm going to see the editor of that magazine the first thing tomorrow morning."

"Couldn't you hold on for just a bit? I understand the way you feel. But I think you might make more headway with him if I paved the way for you. Trent could probably be helpful, too. Don't rush in where angels fear to tread, Bob."

"I tell you I'm taking the next plane."

"Very well, take it. But don't go rushing down to Fleet Street until I've had time to put through a call, at least."

Two days later, Bob was back in Paris again, white faced and dogged and desperate. He burst into Guy's office with as little ceremony as he had burst into his bedroom.

"The editor saw me. Semple, his name is, Christopher Semple. I know I have you to thank for the fact that he didn't turn me away. I do thank you. But I didn't get very far. And I'm scared now. I'm scared out of my shoes."

"What about a spot of something to drink? It's apt to be helpful, under those circumstances. Then suppose you explain."

"I couldn't get Semple to tell me the author's name. But he did come across with the information that he'd met her in East Prussia."

Why didn't you tell me they raised horses in East Prussia? I'd have known then that Zoe would have gone there, after Danzig, and stayed there indefinitely. Anything or any place connected with a horse——"

"Well, so Semple met her in East Prussia?"

"Yes, at some little inn beside one of the Masurian Lakes, where they specialize in a certain local fish. He and she were the only people staying there at the time. You see, it's early and cold yet. But he was off on a holiday, and this was the only time of year he could go. So they started talking, the way people will, you know, in a place like that, if they're all alone in a dining-room. And presently it came out that she was a writer and he was an editor. Then he told her, just jokingly, that he hoped sometime she'd send him a contribution. The next afternoon she brought him the first draft of 'Deserted Dooryard,' He said he couldn't have been any more surprised if someone had suddenly put the Kohinoor diamond in his hand. Since then she's written six stories for him in all. He says they're all marvellous."

"Well, where does she mail them from? And where does he send her cheques? Is she still in East Prussia?"

"No, she isn't. He did tell me that much. But he wouldn't tell me where she went from there, except that it was south. He said if I'd address a letter, or a wire to her, in his care, he'd be very glad to see that it was forwarded. Of course, I did both. I don't suppose I could have expected him to say any more. And I do feel better about her in one way. I know she's been writing, that she's felt like writing, and that what she's been doing has been appreciated. The editor said 'Deserted Dooryard' had had a big reader response already. And it's paid for. I know she isn't short of cash. But what's worrying me now is that he said she wasn't a bit well, that she was coughing her head off. It was because of this terrible cough he got her to promise to go south before she was any worse."

"But it must have been several weeks ago when he saw her. She's probably got over her cough by this time."

"Maybe. But it seems there was a terrific rain storm the night she sailed, and that she caught cold then. Afterwards, the *Batory* had a very rough crossing. She told Semple that much and he passed on the information. Her cold got worse and worse. And, of course, she didn't take any care of herself. You don't know Zoe as well as I do, Guy. She never takes care of herself. It's a wonder she isn't dead."

There was a sudden stillness in the office. Bob broke it himself, his words coming in a rush again.

"That's just it, how do I know she isn't dead?"

"You know she isn't dead because she couldn't be sending stories to Semple if she were."

"Well, she hasn't sent him one for ten days. He admitted that.

And yet I couldn't get him to say another word. She may have died since then, for all I know. I've had a queer hunch from the very beginning. You ask Helen. Why, the day I saw her at Hunter's Green, before I sailed——"

"You're not talking rationally any more, Bob. You said just a few moments that you felt reassured in a way, and now you're running on about her being dead. Of course she isn't dead."

"Well, she's sick then. She's very sick. I'm sure of it. I'm just as sure of it as if I'd heard her telling me so. Good God, if she only would tell me so, and where to find her, then I'd know what to do."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Grenville. But I have a wire for Mr. Morton. It's just been sent over, by special messenger, from the American Embassy, relayed from Washington."

The civil young clerk who had come into the office advanced noiselessly, carrying a small folded slip of blue paper. Bob snatched it from him and tore it open.

"MADAME MORTON GRAVEMENT MALADE PNEUMONIE CLINIQUE
BERNADETTE LOURDES PRIEZ DE FAIRE VENIR PARENT AUSSITOT QUE
POSSIBLE."

PART IX

CHAPTER XXXIII

NONE of it really made sense to Bob, but when relief began to permeate his bewilderment, he did not care much whether it did or not.

Guy insisted on going south with him, blandly telling the British Ambassador that under the circumstances he would be obliged to ask for several days' leave, the circumstances, as he described these, being that he was engaged to Bob's sister, and that he could not possibly let his future brother-in-law set forth on such a journey alone. Bob did not argue with him about the accuracy of the statement; he was too thankful for Guy's companionship. But he did voice some of his perplexity as the plane roared steadily along towards the Pyrenees.

"Why on earth should Zoe have ever gone to Lourdes in the beginning? From what you've told me about it, I should think it would be the last sort of place that would appeal to her."

"There must have been some reason. Probably we'll find out what it is after we get there. After all, it doesn't matter much, does it, why she went, as long as you've located her?"

"It matters a hell of a lot. I don't believe it's a place where she can have decent care, or be comfortably located."

"I wouldn't worry too much about that, if I were you. The Bureau of Medical Evidence at Lourdes is composed of very eminent physicians, of all nationalities. I'm sure the Sisters at the Clinic would call in one or two of these, for consultation with the French doctors on their own staff, if there were any complications."

"They might not recognize the complications until it was too late. I've no confidence at all in Sisters as nurses, especially foreign Sisters."

"Well, that's a natural enough viewpoint for a Protestant and an American. But you may change it. You've changed your viewpoint about a good many things since I first knew you."

"On minor matters. This isn't a minor matter. It's a matter of life or death. The life or death of my wife."

"Yes, old chap, I know. It's beastly hard for you. I'm not underestimating your causes for anxiety. But I still believe, when you get to the Clinic, you may feel better about it. You may feel at least that everything's been done that could be."

The British Vice-Consul, who was blond and boyish, and the

American Vice-Consul, who was dark and saturnine, both met them at Pau. These young men had received wires from their respective chiefs in Paris, and they were both obviously eager to be helpful, but they did not have much news to impart. Zoe had apparently stayed in Pau for about a week—at least she had been registered at the Hôtel de France for that length of time; but she had not tried to get in touch with either of them during that interval. The director of the hotel, however, had supplied the information, reinforced by some he had secured from the chambermaid and the *valet de chambre* who had taken care of Zoe's room, that she had left it very little, and eaten very little, that she seemed to be ailing and that she had a very bad cough. But it did not appear that a doctor or anyone else had been to see her, though occasionally she had gone out for a drive, hiring a chauffeur who was one of the hotel stand-bys, and going in his car. He had taken her to various points of interest in the neighbourhood, and eventually to Lourdes. Then she had not returned from Lourdes at all. She had sent a letter, and money, back by the chauffeur, asking that her clothes be packed and brought to her, and saying that if the bank-note she enclosed were not large enough to cover her bill, she would send more. The note had been one of sizable denomination, so the account had been settled and the clothes dispatched. Since then nothing had been heard from her. Some mail had come in, from England the director thought, and a wire; these had been duly forwarded to the Clinic Bernadette. On their own responsibility, after hearing from Paris, the consuls had both telephoned the Clinic, and had been told by its Directress, whose name was Sœur Stephanie, that Madame Morton, though indeed gravely ill with pneumonia, was holding her own and that there had been no unexpected complications. Sœur Stephanie had expressed herself as much relieved to know that Madame Morton's husband would soon arrive on the scene, and urged that he should have courage and faith that all would yet be well. That seemed to be as much as there was to report.

The short drive from Pau to Lourdes seemed interminable to Bob, the mystic city, when they reached it, an incomprehensible maze of complicated streets, defaced by sentimentalized commercialism. But eventually they swung up a small hill in the very centre of the town and drove along a driveway to a large building flanked with an arcade, where bright flowers were blooming between stone columns. A tall woman of majestic mien, clad in the habit of the Sisters of Nevers, whose face, sombre in repose, kindled when she smiled, was bidding good-bye to some guests as Bob and Guy and the consuls alighted. She seemed to divine their identity instantly, introduced herself as the Superior of the hospital, and said she would lead them through the garden to the private clinic in the rear of the grounds. In order to approach this directly,

she said, they should have taken the small steep road on the other side of the hill. But it did not matter; they could get there almost as quickly this way. She looked at Bob appraisingly and spoke to him sympathetically.

"Le moment est difficile, Monsieur," she said kindly. *"Mais il faut avoir beaucoup de courage et beaucoup de confiance dans le bon Dieu et Notre Dame de Lourdes."*

Guy answered for him. Unfortunately, Mr. Morton did not understand French, he told the Superior. Did any of the Sisters speak English? The Superior shook her head, and admitted that this would constitute a drawback. Well, surely, one of the doctors? Oh yes, one of the doctors, among those called in for consultation, was himself an American. Guy, translating to Bob, did so with satisfaction. There, that was what he had said right along. An American doctor was taking care of Zoe, and of course he would be able to provide for an interpreter, until Zoe could do the interpreting herself. Naturally she was too weak to talk to anyone just now, much less to serve as a go-between for two strangers who did not speak the same language in any sense of the term. But the Superior was right: *Tout s'arrangera*—everything would arrange itself.

Bob could not bring himself to believe that it would. He was still obsessed with perplexity and frantic with anxiety. But as he walked through the vast garden, by the side of the tall nun who moved with such calmness and such dignity, he began to be conscious of the first vague sense of reassurance. No one else had given him any, in all the dreadful weeks he had been through, and now this strange woman, whose very words were as unintelligible to him as Zoe's presence in her domain, imparted it through her personality and her calling. He had said he had no confidence in Sisters of any kind, least of all foreign Sisters, and now she had inspired it; it began to reach him in waves. The large building where they had been first was apparently a charity hospital; Bob could see elderly men and women of humble appearance sunning themselves in the long galleries that ran along its rear, facing the garden which he was now traversing, where roses clambered in profusion, their clusters enclosed by palm trees, and vegetables grew in endless variety. She must have grown wise in the ways of dealing with sorrow as well as suffering, for she was not a young woman herself, if she had administered to the poor and sick throughout her adult life; there could now be little she did not know about human nature and human needs and how to bring comfort to the one and healing to the other. The realization of this came to Bob in a rush of thankfulness; but if the nun herself were aware of the impression she had made, she gave no sign. She went on talking to Guy, tranquilly, as they walked through the garden, and when she paused, Guy turned to Bob and translated.

"Mère Marie Alphonse says the American physician, Doctor Higgins, is waiting at the Clinic to see you. Our wire came through all right, and you were expected. She says he's very able, that she's sure you'll feel better after you've talked with him. She doesn't know whether he'll let you see Zoe or not. She's afraid it's extremely doubtful. But she's made a very kind suggestion. She says it is their practice to receive only ladies as patients at the Clinic, but that there's an empty room, next to Zoe's, and that both of these lead out on a little terrace-well, you can see that from here now. If you'd like to take this room, then you can use it as much as you care to, and be within calling distance all the time. She says that Sœur Baptistine, the Sœur Cuisinière, would be honoured to give you your meals, if she could please you. I should think it was a very sound idea all around. Then when Zoe gets better, she can be wheeled right out on the terrace, and you and she can occupy it together, in comfortable privacy."

The Superior had opened a rustic gate leading into a small enclosure surrounded by a trimly clipped hedge, where the stone statue of a young peasant girl, with a lamb in her arms and another at her feet, rose benignly amidst the flowers. The Clinic, separated from the main garden by this enclosure, was a neat rectangular modern building, modest as to both size and appearance. The room into which the visitors were ushered, which contained the inevitable marble mantel and brocaded gilt furniture of all conventionally appointed French salons, was so small that it would hardly hold them. But the doctor, who was awaiting them there, and whose substantial bulk had the effect of completely dwarfing his prim surroundings, was as American as a prairie breeze. He rose abruptly, and singled Bob out with one swift shrewd glance.

"Don't you worry about your wife," he said in a strong Mid-western accent, "she's coming along all right. At least, she will, if she doesn't have a setback. Sorry we couldn't reach you sooner. But she was delirious, and we didn't know where to send or who for, until we found her passport. Then the only address we had was Washington. Your London wire didn't get here until last night—of course, that had to be forwarded, too. We opened it and answered it, but I guess you'd already left Paris before the answer got there—one of those general mix-ups. But all's well that ends well. If your friends here will excuse me, I'll take you into the dispensary and explain to you what's what. It won't take me long to say. Mostly it'll just be telling you to keep your shirt on."

His brevity, like his breeziness, was another source of relief after the endless delays and formalities through which Bob had passed. Apparently Zoe had already been a very sick woman when she had come to Lourdes for a day's sightseeing, so sick that she should not have been out of bed at all, much less taking a long drive and rambling about a hilly town. She had come to the hospital in the

first place merely because her chauffeur had brought her there as a matter of routine, just as he had taken her to the Cachot and the Grotto to see the usual tourist sights connected with Bernadette Soubirous. That much the doctor knew. Mère Marie Alphonse had acted as her guide in the hospital, as she was apt to do with visitors, when other duties permitted, and gradually she and Mrs. Morton had drifted into general conversation. Mère Marie Alphonse would be able to tell him more about that than the doctor would. Oh, he did not speak French; well, then doubtless his wife would tell him herself eventually. But the Superior had guessed that her visitor was feverish, and had persuaded her to spend the night at the Clinic. By morning it had been evident to all the Sisters, and to the staff physicians, that she would not be able to leave it for a long time. It was then that Doctor Higgins had been sent for.

He spoke of symptoms and of treatment with a minimum of technicality, but even so, Bob did not understand much of what he was saying, or feel that it mattered whether he did or not. What he did understand was that Zoe was in the hands of an American doctor, who, though summoned much too tardily, had done everything conceivable since then to assure her care and recovery. Beyond that, his own chief concern lay in other directions.

"Hasn't she ever asked for me? Or for anyone?"

"No. She's talked about you, but only when she was out of her head. We couldn't take much stock in what she said then. In her lucid moments she's been very silent, and we've encouraged that, because she ought not to talk. And, of course, she's been in a stupor part of the time."

"Didn't you ask her whether she'd like you to send for someone?"

"Yes. Of course we asked her that. But she said 'no.' She was pretty determined about it, too. That's why we didn't do it, until it was obviously indicated."

"Well, can I see her now?"

"No. At least only through the door, when she's asleep and won't know anything about it. I still don't know whether she wants to see you or not. I can't risk giving her any kind of a shock. But you can stay here at the Clinic if you like. I believe the Superior's already explained about that. Then you'll be on hand if she should take a sudden turn for the worse."

"You mean you won't let me into her room unless you know she's dying?"

"Yes, that's just what I mean. For the present. But I've told you I don't think she's going to die. I've told you I think she'll get well unless there are complications. And when she's a little better, we'll show her that telegram you sent her from London, and see what she says. If she wants to answer it, we'll let her know the answer very handy. Now I suppose you'd like to see your friends, and

report what I've said. One of them can stay here, if you like, until we can find you an interpreter. Then you better see about getting settled yourself."

It was Guy who stayed with him, the two young consuls taking their departure with the assurance that one or the other would "drop down" from Pau every day, and that the telephone service was really not at all bad, all things considered; they would count on Bob to give them both a ring, whenever he thought they could do anything, or even if he thought he would just like to talk to someone. He arranged his belongings in the small white-washed room assigned to him, which contained a narrow bed, a corner washstand, two straightbacked chairs, and a wardrobe so shallow and short that his clothes would not fit into it. A crucifix, behind which some faded strands of palm had been thrust, and a small picture of Saint Bernadette, in the habit of the Sisters of Nevers, were the only ornaments in the room. There were two open doors, opposite each other, one leading to the corridor and the other to the terrace, and a third one, on the side, which was closed, and which led, he knew, into Zoe's room. Occasionally soft sounds seemed to come from there, but they were indeterminate; he could not guess what caused them or what they meant. The *Sœur Cuisinière* appeared with a scrubby, sturdy little maid in her wake, and directed the laying of a cloth and the setting of a table on the terrace; shortly thereafter an excellent meal, served in a surprising number of courses, made its appearance, and he and Guy ate it together, in sight of the pleasant near-by garden and the clear-cut mountains which rose in the distance. It was Guy who called Bob's attention to the view, saying that Zoe would be sure to enjoy it when she was better. For all he noticed himself, Bob might as well have been eating, or trying to eat, in a cellar or a roundhouse.

They were still sitting on the terrace, smoking companionable pipes, when Doctor Higgins came out there and told Bob to take off his shoes and come inside. The third door, which had been closed before, was open now, and the doctor beckoned to Bob to stand on the threshold and look ahead of him. The room beyond was exactly like his own, very clean and bare, very small and austere. But a nursing Sister was sitting watchfully beside the bed, and in the bed itself Zoe was lying. Her small head was propped up with pillows, so that her breathing would be easier, and her red hair, which was plaited in two long braids falling over her breast, gave the only touch of colour to the white room. Her face was paler and more pointed than Bob had ever seen it, and her hands, which lay loosely on the counterpane, were transparent. But she did not seem to be suffering; she seemed to be sleeping; and though her breathing was laboured, there was no struggle with it. Bob stood and watched her as well as he could through his blurred

vision, not daring to put up his hand and wipe his eyes for fear that even this gesture might make a noise; and presently the doctor touched him on the shoulder and beckoned him out on the terrace again. While he was replacing his shoes the doctor talked to him.

"You see, she's resting comfortably. She's doing very nicely."

"She looks awfully sick to me."

"Then I'm glad you didn't see her three or four days ago. That probably would have upset you."

"What in hell makes you think I'm not upset now?"

"You better not be. If you get upset, I shall send you packing. You've already been told male patients aren't received at this clinic. You're a guest here, as a special favour."

"I understand about that. But I still don't see how you can think I wouldn't be upset."

He was fumbling with the laces of his shoes, thankful for the pretext they gave him for keeping his face hidden. But he could not see to tie them yet. The doctor left him, still trying to do it, and a little later came back to say that the British Vice-Consul had just telephoned from Pau, saying he had run down an English nurse who was vacationing there, and who spoke good French. She would be glad to come over, and he, the Vice-Consul, would be glad to bring her. The doctor had spoken to Mère Marie Alphonse and Sœur Stephanie, and they had both assured him that this English nurse, Sister Agnes, would be very welcome. She would be there in about an hour. Doctor Higgins hoped this would be satisfactory to Mr. Morton.

"It's very satisfactory. Thank you. Now may I go and see my wife again?"

"I don't think you'd better. She's half awake at the moment. She might look across towards the door and get a shock. I've kept telling you we've got to avoid that."

The doctor departed, leaving Bob and Guy in quiet possession of the terrace again. The scrubby, swarthy little maid reappeared to bring a tea of enormous proportions. Bob regarded it contemptuously, but Guy received it with grateful enthusiasm, and while undertaking to dispose of it unaided, suggested that now they had been lucky enough to find this English Sister, he might perhaps go back to Pau with the Vice-Consul, and from there make connections for the north."

"I don't want to rush my fences, as you call it, with my Chief any more than I do with Helen," he said. "After all, I did slightly stretch a point when I spoke of you as my future brother-in-law."

"You certainly did. Not but what I wish it were so, Guy."

"It will be. And you and Zoe'll have me hanging around your house all the time. I expect you'll get tired of the sight of me. But for the moment, there doesn't seem to be anything else I can do for you, and I think I'd better toddle along."

"You're probably right. You usually are."

He was favourably impressed with the appearance of Sister Agnes, when she came, and since her presence not only represented a form of nursing on which he felt he could count, but also the end of his own linguistic difficulties, he was fairly philosophical about Guy's departure. He sat out on the terrace by himself, did his best to evince appreciation of the large dinner which, in due course, followed the large lunch and the large tea, and overwhelmingly tired, prepared to turn in as soon as the dishes had been removed and the cloth folded and put in the table drawer with his neatly ringed napkin. The Clinic was quiet for the night. He could not hear a sound anywhere. Mère Marie Alphonse had been back to see him a second time, and, through Sister Agnes, had explained to him that Sœur Stephanie would sit with the English Sister by Zoe's bed through the night, in order that the routine might be made quite clear to her, and that Madame would not be startled if by any chance she should wake and see an unexplained stranger beside her. If he had been able to speak to the Superior direct, he would have begged her to remain and keep watch herself, for it seemed to him inevitable, since he drew strength and solace from her presence, that Zoe should do the same. But it would have sounded silly to have tried to say this through an interpreter, and now that Mère Marie Alphonse had gone back to the big hospital, in her calm measured way, a sense of emptiness came with her absence. Doctor Higgins had also returned again, presenting Bob to the resident interne, with whom the latter was able only to exchange polite bows, and listening not too unfeelingly to Bob's plea of being allowed to look in on Zoe once more and to leave the door between the two rooms open through the night.

"It won't do her any harm, if you keep your light off and don't get to moving around. But I don't see what good it's going to do you."

"I'd feel nearer to her that way. And I could hear her if she spoke."

"She won't speak much. She'll just ask for a drink of water, or something of the sort. And there'll be two nurses there to give her that."

"She might ask for me after all. I can go in, can't I, if she should?"

"I'm safe enough in saying 'yes.' She won't."

"Isn't Lourdes a place where strange things are supposed to happen?"

"Yes. But I haven't seen anything stranger happen here than I've seen in my own home town in Peoria. I've been here six months, and I won't say but what it's an interesting experience, serving on this International Medical Board. You run up against all sorts of people, patients and doctors both, to make you open

your eyes. But no matter how wide open they are, they don't take in any miracles. Mine, anyway."

The doctor went off, and with the sound of the wicket gate closing and of his retreating footsteps going down the little hill, the stillness became more complete than before. Bob undressed noiselessly, turned out his light, which consisted of a single bare bulb suspended from the ceiling, and walked across the rugless floor to the door that separated his room from Zoe's. The handle turned under his fingers without a creak and the door swung quietly open on its hinges. He placed a book against it to keep it ajar, and tip-toed back to his bed.

He fell asleep almost instantly, and when he waked again he saw by the illuminated dial of his watch that he had already slept for more than five hours. Everything about was still dark and still hushed; but presently the early Continental dawn would be breaking, and with it would come the familiar sounds of another day. He lay motionless, waiting for them to begin, and believing that when they did his sense of strangeness would pass. For the time being he was awed by a sense of tension that he could not seem to bear. In an effort to break this, but without understanding what impelled him to do so, he began to form words noiselessly with his lips.

"Zoe darling, I've come for you. I'm here, close beside you. But I can't get through to you. The doctor won't let me unless you ask for me. Please ask for me so that I can."

The impulsion to speak gradually left him, the intensity in the atmosphere slowly began to slacken. But still he felt that he was surrounded by the supernal. He could have sworn that he was not alone in his bare little room, though what or whose was the presence there, he could not have told. He continued to lie very still, awed by the silence which was unlike any he had ever known before, powerful and prescient. Then with unmistakable clarity, he heard Zoe's voice.

"I'm thirsty. *J'ai soif.*"

"Here is some water for you, Madam. You may speak to me in English if you like. I'm the new nurse, Sister Agnes, come over from Pau to help Sœur Stephanie."

"That's very kind of you."

Apparently Zoe was accepting the presence of the English nurse unquestioningly after all; it had not startled or surprised her. But presently she spoke again.

"I'm lonely."

"You've no need to be lonely, Madam. We haven't left you for a minute, Sœur Stephanie and I."

"I know. That's very kind of you, too. But I'm lonely just the same. The night's very long."

"It's almost morning."

"It isn't morning yet. It's dark. It's terribly quiet. I don't like it so dark and so quiet."

"Madam, it's best you shouldn't try to talk. You know that. It's best you should lie still and go to sleep again if you can. The next time you wake up it will be morning."

"I won't talk any more if you'll let my husband come and sit here beside me. I'll go to sleep again as soon as I've spoken to him. But he's come a long way to find me and I want to see him."

Bob swung himself out of bed and groped his way across the bare floor of his room again, towards the door that stood ajar. His heart was beating so hard that he wondered if he would be able to hear the nurse's answer above its thumping. But her voice came to him distinctly, answering as if Zoe's knowledge of his presence were natural and expected.

"Very well, Madam. I shall call your husband at once. I'm sure he will feel the same way, that he will wish to see you."

Her skirts rustled slightly as she rose. Bob was already beside her, touching her arm. The French Sister, who had been on her knees beside the bed, rose, too, and Sister Agnes said something to her in French, which of course Bob did not understand. But he did understand that they were both withdrawing, that presently he would be alone with Zoe in the darkness. When he knew they were gone, he felt for her hand and found it. In the same instant, he also knew that he had found a new heaven and a new earth.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"I HEARD that there was such wonderful sunshine at Pau. Christopher Semple, and everyone else who talked to me about my silly little cough, kept saying I ought to go where there was sunshine. And I thought Pau would do just as well as any other place."

"I don't suppose Christopher Semple, or anyone else who talked to you about the wonderful sunshine, reminded you that Pau was fairly near the Spanish border? And that when you stopped coughing, if you were still alive, you could sneak through some mountain pass, and take your chances of getting killed by a bullet instead of by pneumonia, while you were getting a nice exclusive story?"

"No, because I didn't need to be reminded of that. I thought of that myself."

They laughed together. They had reached the point where they could tease each other now. They had come a long way since they had first felt each other's presence and found each other's hands in the silent darkness.

"As a matter of fact, since I can't go to Spain, you ought to. You could do a very good Spanish piece, if you'd put your back to it. There's no reason why you shouldn't become a crackerjack foreign correspondent and beat the daylights out of me—on paper, I mean—except that you've never been interested enough to try."

"But I have. Not to beat the daylights out of you, but to get some sort of stuff on paper. That's one of the things I've been meaning to tell you, as soon as I could get around to it."

"Oh Bob, what? It sounds terribly exciting!"

"Look here, you're not supposed to get excited. If Sister Agnes so much as suspects that you might be, she'll come in and say it's time for your nap, or your nourishment, or something, and wouldn't I like to take my French grammar down into the garden for two or three hours. But if you'll be a good girl, and lie still, I will tell you."

"I'm an awfully good girl. I'm lying terribly still."

"Well, you see, there were a lot of protests when we cut out the 'World Kaleidoscope' column. There were bound to be. I knew there would be, before I was through telling you I wanted to do away with it. I was just cutting off my nose to spite my face, that was all."

"And it's such a nice nose, too. I've always thought it was the best-looking nose I ever saw on a man. It seems too bad you wanted to cut it off. And too bad you wanted to spite your face. Because that's very nice, too. Much too nice to be treated spitefully."

"Well, anyhow, as I was trying to say when you interrupted me

in such a flattering manner, Mary cabled me that I'd have to substitute for you until we could get you back on the job. Of course, I couldn't tell her that I didn't know whether you'd ever consent to go back on the job, and I couldn't risk losing half of the subscribers to our syndicate either. So I just dove in and did the best I could. Guy helped me get started. He gave me encouragement and he gave me material, too. He's a grand guy. Hell, I didn't mean to make a rotten pun like that. But you get the idea."

"Yes, I get the idea. So you got started? And you've kept it up?"

"Uh-huh. Some of the pieces haven't been so hot. I fell down on the ones I wrote from Russia—those were the first I did, you see, without Guy at my elbow. Then I wrote one from Danzig that I really do believe was good, though I didn't get much of a comeback to it. I've got my carbon here, I'll show it to you sometime and see what you think of it. I'd value your opinion a lot. But when I got into Germany I sort of hit my stride. I sopped up what I saw like a sponge. I'm still squeezing it out."

"Oh Bob, I do think it's too exciting for words! I can't tell you how happy I am about it. Because from now on, we can share the foreign work, can't we? You can cover it part of the time and I can cover it the rest of the time. In that way, you'll learn the ropes over here, better and better, and I won't get rusty on Washington."

"You never got rusty on Washington. That was just another of those words I could eat. You got more than I did out of one kind of a crowd, and I got more than you did out of another kind, but that would have been all to the good, if I'd been willing to go ahead on those lines, instead of getting all burnt up because you were better than I was. And here you are heaping coals of fire on my head by saying you'd be glad to have me share the foreign work. Do you honestly mean it, Zoe? Wouldn't you feel I was butting in? Aren't you ever sore when someone gets in your way?"

"If you're talking about yourself, you never get in my way. I've been plenty sore at you, a good many times, and you know it. But not about the work. That would be pretty dumb of me, wouldn't it?"

"Not nearly so dumb as it's been for me to take it out on you whenever I got hot under the collar about anything. That's what it boils down to, doesn't it?"

"Of course not. It just boils down to the fact that some people get jealous and some don't, just the way some people have red hair and some people have brown hair. You like my hair——"

"I'll say I do. I think those braids are the cutest things I ever saw in my life."

"Well, and I like yours. We like the rest of each other's make-up, too, the good parts and the bad parts. We just happen to fit. Suppose we let it go at that."

He saw that she was speaking with the utmost sincerity, that it

really had never entered her mind to resent such success as he had achieved, and that it never would. She did not give him a chance to grovel either. Evidently she did not want him to. She went on talking about plans.

"I think you ought to start for Spain right away, so that when your German material begins to run low, you'll have something to fall back on. Why don't you drive over to Pau this afternoon and see the consul about a permit? There's no sense in sneaking through a mountain pass except as a last resort. I won't worry while you're in Spain, truly I won't. Journalists' wives have to school themselves not to do that, when their husbands go to dangerous places, just as sailors' and soldiers' wives have to when their husbands are in dangerous places. I've seen some wonderful examples. And I won't be lonely while you're gone either, because I'll keep looking forward to having you come back, and knowing it won't be long, and reunions are such fun that it's almost worth parting in order to have them. Maybe I can begin to write a little myself, too. Now that this suggestion for developing 'Deserted Dooryard' and 'Cherished Orchard' into a book has come in, my fingers are simply itching to get hold of the tools of my trade."

"Madam, I'm very sorry to interrupt you. But it's time you took some nourishment. I'm sure you'll find this *petite marmite* very tasty. The Sœur Cuisinière's taken great pains with it. And after you've eaten it, I expect you'd better try to take a little nap. If Doctor Higgins finds you're looking tired when he comes in this evening, he'll be very angry with us. And that wouldn't do at all, would it, when you're getting on so famously?"

"I told you so," Bob said, rising and pushing back his chair. "I told you that if you got excited, Sister Agnes would come in and say you'd got to have a nap and some nourishment. Really, Sister, I did warn her, and she promised she'd be a good girl and lie still. And then she went ahead and got excited just the same. I don't see why you put up with such a troublesome patient. It's impossible to make her behave."

He leaned over and pulled Zoe's braids, kissed her on both cheeks—which he said was a French fashion that had much to commend it—and went whistling out into the corridor and down the steps to the garden, his French grammar under his arm. Once or twice when he had first begun to whistle, he felt rather guilty about it, and asked Sister Agnes to find out whether it disturbed anyone. Her answer had been reassuring: the Sisters, whose lives contained so much silence, and the patients, none of them critically ill at the moment, enjoyed hearing him whistle; it sounded cheerful to them. Well, then, it sounded the way he felt, he said, and went on whistling, more frequently and loudly all the time. But he was not whistling so loudly now that he could not hear Zoe speaking to Sister Agnes, while she obediently ate her *petite marmite*.

"This is good, Sister. I didn't realize how late it was and how hungry I was. I got so interested talking to my husband about our work and our plans. Isn't he a grand person?"

"I don't remember ever meeting a more agreeable gentleman, Madam. All the Sisters say the same, I assure you. And the most devoted husband, if you'll permit me to add that, too, Madam."

The pleasant murmur of voices continued to follow Bob through the open windows, but he could not catch the words any more. He sat down on the stone bench beside the statue of the Little Shepherdess, and opened his French grammar. He was studying this faithfully now, and Sister Agnes was guiding him along through it. She had gone to school in France herself and had done some teaching before definitely deciding on nursing as her life's work; he found her extremely helpful. The other Sisters were helpful, too. He pointed to different objects, while he was eating his meals and moving around his room, and they told him the names of these objects; the following day they catechized him, merrily, to see how much he would remember. He remembered a good deal; he learned fast; and he found that the foundations which had been laid at the Mortonville High School for such knowledge, faulty and incomplete though these were, did help him with structure and spelling, though their effect on his first efforts at correct pronunciation had certainly been disastrous. He had always taken it for granted that he would never be able to learn to speak a foreign language, and that it was not worth the trouble anyway; English was good enough for him, and it ought to get him anywhere. If it didn't, that was just too bad——

The scrubby little maid, long since identified as Solange, brought him his lunch in the garden. The sun was now very hot on the terrace in the middle of the day; Sœur Baptistine thought he would be more comfortable in the shade of the statue. When he had finished eating, Sister Agnes joined him with the good news that Zoe had devoured all of the *petite marmite*, that she had gone to sleep immediately afterwards, and that she was still sleeping soundly. Sœur Stephanie was listening for her, and would let them know when she waked; meanwhile perhaps Mr. Morton would like to go on with their discussion of the verb *vouloir*, and the general rules governing the use of the subjunctive—— They had finished their discussion for the day, and Bob was tapping away on his typewriter, when Doctor Higgins swung the wicket gate open and came in. The two men hailed each other with mutual cordiality, and the doctor went on upstairs, saying he would stop for a chat on his way out, after he had seen the patient. His report, when he made it, was extremely favourable; she was certainly making rapid progress, and the fact that she had such an excellent appetite and was sleeping so well was largely responsible for it; this and the fact that she was so contented, not to say cheerful. Of course, her state

of mind had more to do with her condition than almost anything else. At first she hadn't seemed to care whether she got well or not; the doctor hadn't liked to say so before, but this was what had really worried him. Now if she only wouldn't overtax her strength, wouldn't try to cheat by staying up a little longer than he said she might when she first got up, wouldn't insist on doing anything to exhaust her reserves, like this writing she'd begun to talk about—

"I've been meaning to talk to you about that myself, Doctor Higgins. You see, she's had this offer from some English publishers, very good ones, for a book. No one's ever suggested that she could do a book before, and she's tickled to death. It's what every journalist secretly hopes to do some day. I know exactly how she feels about it, because it's the same way I feel myself. Perhaps you don't, but probably it's something the way you felt when you had your first chance to perform a major operation on an important patient, or when you got the appointment on the Medical Board here, or something like that."

"I hadn't thought of it in that light before. I do see what you mean now though. Just the same, I can't have her getting too tired."

"Would you consider telling her she might try writing for an hour, or whatever you think best, at a time, and letting me keep an eye on her? I can tell when she's getting tired, especially when she's getting tired because she's written too long. I've watched her do it a good many years, without interfering. But you can depend on me to interfere now all right."

"Very well, I'll consider it. When you go upstairs, you may tell your wife I've said she could start writing a little next week, provided she keeps on getting better at the rate she's doing now. That is, if she can manage in bed with a pencil and a stiff-covered copy-book."

"She can manage with anything. I know she'll be delighted. It'll give her something to look forward to. That's important, isn't it, with sick people?"

"Very. Well, she's looking forward to seeing you at this moment. So I won't keep you."

"I'm going to keep you though, Doctor Higgins, long enough to ask you one more question. How much danger is there in saying anything that might be upsetting to her? You see, she's already beginning to make plans, and she seems to enjoy doing it; but some of them can't get very far until she knows more about several situations than she does now. I've let her ramble on, up to the present, but sooner or later she'll expect me to come back with some suggestions of my own; and it's pretty hard to pull the wool over eyes, or to dodge her, when she wants to find something out. She isn't going to be satisfied, either, just with her own writing. She said this morning that I ought to be starting for Spain. I suppose

that attitude will be hard for you to understand, too. The born journalist doesn't think battle, murder or sudden death—your own or anyone else's—ought to keep you from getting your story through. And Zoe isn't anything else but just that."

"I'd be very sorry to see you start for Spain at present. I can tell you that right off the bat. You're necessary to her recovery where you are, and her attitude, or any other journalist's, about getting stories is entirely beyond the point, as far as I'm concerned. In fact, I'm not sure I wouldn't be justified in pitching you off the terrace, so that you'd break an arm or a leg, just to keep you here." The doctor grinned and went on, a little more seriously: "As to these problems that might upset her, but that she's got to hear about sooner or later, you'll have to be guided by circumstances. Don't rouse her suspicions by refusing point blank to answer questions. I can see that would be bad. On the other hand, don't go volunteering any disturbing information just yet. And when you do begin to hand it out, don't do it by the fistful. Let it seep through a little at a time. That way, I should think she could take it. I hope so anyway. I don't mind telling you I like that girl a lot. I'd hate to have her made unhappy now, after everything she's been through."

It was all very well for Doctor Higgins to say that, Bob thought ironically, as if the physician were the only person who cared much about Zoe or would hate to have her made unhappy. The peace of mind he himself had built up, so painfully, was not proof against worry concerning the questions which she might ask at any time and the confession he must eventually make to her, or concerning the effect that both would have on her well-being. He was relieved when two or three days went by, in which she seemed absorbed by her plans for her book, and satisfied merely to make suggestions, in the light of her own experiences, that might help him in a general way with his current contributions to the bureau. But he knew that this preoccupation and this detachment could not last. Sooner or later something would have to be said, sooner or later something would have to happen——

The eventuality he dreaded arose, characteristically, when he least expected it. Zoe's bed was now wheeled out on the terrace twice every day, before the heat reached its height and after this was over; during these periods Bob always sat there beside her. Both intervals were enjoyable, but the early evening was an especially tranquil and tender hour. The light on the mountains was at its loveliest then, and a fragrance rose from the garden which was lacking earlier in the day. The sounds which drifted towards them were not the noises of the bustling working world, but the singing of birds and the ringing of the Angelus and the chanting of the nuns. After Solange had brought them their tea, no one came to

disturb them until Zoe's early bedtime; the nap and the nourishment, which had come to be a joke between them, no longer loomed ahead of them; both were over for the day. They were able to talk to each other, as they had never done before, without any danger of interruption and without any sense of hurry or tension. The leisure, the intimacy, and the beauty of this communion became increasingly precious to them as the days drifted by. They grew close to each other in a way which they had never paralleled in the union of their flesh.

And then Zoe asked, innocently enough, about Helen.

"Doesn't she ever write to you, Bob?"

"Yes, she writes to me."

"You haven't said anything about it. You haven't shown me any of her letters."

"I've had a letter from Harry Henderson you might like to see," he answered evasively. "You may remember him. In fact, he was a sort of beau of yours once, wasn't he?"

"He took me to a few dances in Paris and gave me a mild rush for a while, if you call that being a beau. I lost sight of him there, later, in the general shuffle. But I do remember him at the Embassy in Mexico, about twenty pounds overweight and foolishly fond of gold braid."

"Put out your tongue, Zoe. I believe I can make an encouraging report to Doctor Higgins. It's growing sharper every day."

She pointed it at him playfully, and he could see that it looked delightfully pink and clean and healthful. But she was not diverted from the topic on which she had embarked.

"Well, what did Harry Henderson have to say about Helen?"

"He said she'd made a most tremendous hit in Mexico. She has the whole Terraza family feeding out of her hand now. She stayed with them while she was looking for a house of her own, which was her first tactful gesture. If she'd gone to a hotel instead, they probably never would have forgiven her for appearing to publicly spurn their hospitality. I imagine they feared she'd do exactly that, if she ever did come back there. Of course they urged her to stay on with them, but she was tactful about that, too; she said they must give her a chance to return their hospitality. She found a very nice house quite near the Casa Catalina, and she's entertained there on a lavish scale. The Terrazas are tremendously impressed with her grand manner and the celebrities who come flocking to her doors. I understand they flock there themselves, almost every day—all the aunts and uncles in deep mourning, and the sporting cousins and the piously inclined nieces. And Doña Amelia is much more in awe of Helen now than Helen is of her."

"Well, it's a long lane that has no turning. How did the experiment with Bennie turn out?"

"Oh, very well. He's had the time of his young life there and

everyone has made much of him. The mere fact that Helen brought a little boy along with her, and that she devotes part of every day to teaching him and taking him around, instead of leading a life entirely given over to idle elegance, was the final touch to make the picture perfect. Bennie's done something rather ingenious on his own initiative, too. He's had a saddle sent to his father, made especially for Welby. Bennie thought up the design himself. It's a regular Mexican saddle, except that all its characteristics are a little exaggerated—the pommel's slightly higher, the back slightly wider and slightly raised, the covered stirrups are slightly bigger and fixed so they can be joined with a strap under a horse's belly. Welby's using the saddle regularly. He's riding again all over Hunter's Green. And believe it or not, he's riding Butterfly. Of course she's a pretty old lady now, as mares go, but it seems there's life in the old girl yet. Welby's simply delighted with Bennie's present, everything about it, I mean, the thoughtfulness and smartness it showed and the possibilities it opened up."

"Was Ronnie delighted, too?"

"Why, yes, I guess so. Ronnie's always delighted with anything that pleases Welby, isn't she?"

"Yes, she's a model wife," Zoe answered. For the first time, Bob noticed a touch of sarcasm in her voice, with uncomfortable foreboding. "She hasn't had her baby yet, I suppose?"

"Yes, she has."

"For heaven's sake, Bob, you haven't told me any news at all! What kind of a baby?"

"She had twins. Both boys. I had a cable just a few days ago. They're doing finely and so is she. Apparently she had a very easy time."

"Oh, she would have! And now she'll be able to nurse them both, and they'll thrive and she won't get dragged down. And about fifteen months from now, or a year and a half at the most, she'll have another boy, or maybe twins again. And so on and so on."

"Zoe darling, don't talk like that. It seems just as unnatural now to have you spiteful as it would to hear you swear. It's just because I was afraid you'd take it like this that I didn't tell you. I know you feel badly, and why, that that's the reason you're covering up your feelings. I haven't forgotten that time we laid out all the little clothes that had been given you at Brenda's party on the spare room bed, and talked about 'Flash' and 'Scoop.' I know you never got over losing that baby and—not having another. I couldn't bear to say anything that would make you feel badly. So I didn't say anything. I'm sorry if you think I ought to have told you about Ronnie's twins without making you ask."

She turned her head away from him without answering, and he knew that she was crying, shedding the bitter uncontrollable tears that spring partly from physical weakness and partly from mental

anguish. For the second time in his life, he yearned desperately to comfort her with the assurance that her loss was not irreplaceable or her longing insatiable; but he was far more powerless to do this now than he had been before. If he had not been such a coward and such a fool, he told himself, they might well have had another child years ago; it was far less probable that they could have one now, even if Zoe would live with him again, after she knew what he still must tell her, before he could commit her to the homecoming on which he knew she was already definitely counting—

She had not turned back to him again when Sister Agnes came to say that their evening hour on the terrace was ended, and he saw the nurse looking suspiciously and anxiously at Zoe as the bed was wheeled back into the little white-washed room. It was his habit to help with this proceeding, and when the bed was in place again, he kissed Zoe quietly, and told her he was going out for a little while, but that he would look in on her when he came back from his walk, and see if he could bribe Sister Agnes into letting him have another visit with her before she settled down for the night. She let him go without response or protest, and heavy-heartedly he made his way through the town to Doctor Higgins' office. The physician was not in, the attendant informed him, and for a long time, which seemed much longer than it actually was, he sat and waited, aimlessly, for the physician's return. There was nothing he could read, and nothing he could do, to make the slow moments pass. When the doctor finally reappeared, Bob guessed at once that he had been to the Clinic during his own absence.

"Well," the doctor said, not unkindly, "I gather the first of those crises you've been dreading came off today. But don't look at me as if you'd committed murder and expected me to be an accessory after the fact. Don't try to tell me what's happened either. It isn't necessary I should hear all these things in detail. I know you're doing the best you can, and I know that every convalescent woman has her ups and downs and her crying spells. If I didn't know that much by this time, I wouldn't be much of a doctor. In your place, I'd go on back to the Clinic. I've a hunch your wife wants to see you again by this time, that she's more or less watching for you to come in. You can use your own judgment. If you think she'd like to have you stay with her tonight, until she goes to sleep, you can send Sister Agnes downstairs and keep her there, just so long as there's some kind of a nurse within call."

Zoe did want him to stay with her, and he did send Sister Agnes downstairs. Zoe told him, contritely, as soon as the nurse was out of hearing, that she was sorry she had behaved like such a fool, and especially sorry she had been spiteful about Ronnie; it just went to prove that she had a jealous streak in her, too, which showed he should not reproach himself for being jealous about her

work; everyone was jealous about something, she guessed, just as everyone was superstitious about something, in spite of all the elaborate denials that were made on the subject. He was an angel to put up with her vagaries at all. Of course he had done just right not to say anything about the twins, since he had guessed beforehand she would be such a poor sport about taking it. But she hoped he had sent off a cable of congratulation, signed by her name as well as his, and she also hoped that when he heard more from Hunter's Green, he would show her the letter. She wouldn't be so silly again. After saying this she showed the same disinclination to dwell on the subject that she had when they were discussing his attitude towards her work a few days earlier, and began to talk to him, apparently quite unconnectedly, about a couple into whom she had kept running in East Prussia. A German official, formerly a provincial governor, to whom some South American friends had given her a letter, and a titled Englishwoman, who were travelling together. She had not known anything about the Englishwoman, when she presented her letter, which she had done in Zoppot. Why, yes, of course she had gone there. It must have been after Bob himself had left. But presently this Lady Hamilton—no, the name wasn't really Hamilton, but it amused her to call the lady that, and really it wasn't so far off—had come and joined the German dignitary and herself in the lounge, and presentations had taken place as a matter of course. After that, she found out the two were vacationing in each other's company. They usually came into hotel dining-rooms very late, and they were a little conspicuous, partly because of that, and partly because they were generally the only two persons in the place who were wearing evening-dress. They were both past middle age, both very distinguished-looking; no one seemed to regard their association as the least scandalous. They had been entertained at more than one great *Herrenhaus* where Zoe herself was staying, and she could not help being very intrigued by them. She had a theory, which no one else seemed to share, that some of the Prussian aristocrats and some of the British aristocrats were working hand in glove at that stage. After all, they were interrelated in many cases; they had many of the same standards and traditions. It would not be so strange, in spite of the tension which seemed to be increasing so fast between the two governments. What did Bob think of her hunch?

He told her that he thought it was certainly provocative and that it might very well be sound; she had given him another clue that he would like to follow up sooner or later. Seeing that he was really interested, she enlarged on her theme. Did he remember the tragic instance of an airplane accident, she asked him, in which almost an entire German family of high degree had been wiped out, on their way to attend their son's wedding to the daughter of a former British Ambassador to the United States? The marriage

had taken place in London on scheduled time, under conditions of the greatest gloom, and the young groom, who had suddenly succeeded to unawaited rank and responsibilities, had automatically made his bride the chatelaine of a vast estate, and the partner in all his enterprises. But she had never lost her English outlook, and she never would——

"If there should be a war between England and Germany, Bob, what would a girl like that do? What would a boy like that do?"

"I don't know. There must have been similar cases to the one you've been telling me about before the World War. It might be intriguing to follow them through. I didn't realize you knew so much about Germany, Zoe. I've always thought of you as featuring France."

"Well, I have, of course. But I've seen a good deal of Germany too, first and last. I loved East Prussia, Bob, Trakehnen especially, but all the *Herrenhäuser* where they specialize in horse breeding. And the *Junkers* were kind and hospitable to me personally. I shan't forget that. But I've had some rather strange experiences too. It won't worry you, will it, if I tell you about them?"

"Probably; but I'd like to hear about them just the same."

"All right—— Do you remember that awfully aristocratic-looking Secretary of the German Embassy in Washington with the surprisingly plebeian name of Schmidt?"

"Certainly I do. He had a beautiful blonde who was one of the best dancers in Washington. But she went back to—Hanover, wasn't it, where they lived?—to have a baby. I understand he'd left to join her there."

"Yes, that's what everyone understood. But the night after I got to Berlin, I went out rather late to get some cough medicine, and——"

"Good Lord, if you needed cough medicine, why didn't you send someone from the hotel to get it for you, and stay in bed yourself?"

"I don't know. I just didn't. And as I was walking down the Wilhelmstrasse, whom should I see, coming towards me very smart in an S.S. uniform, but Schmidtty."

"No!"

"Yes! He was with an equally striking companion, also in S.S. uniform, whom he duly presented, and there was much clicking of heels and all that. But somehow I didn't feel Schmidtty was awfully glad to see me."

"There wasn't any reason why he shouldn't have been. You've been awfully careful, so far, in what you've written about Germany."

"Yes, but I don't think he felt sure I always would be. I don't feel so sure of it myself, for that matter. But that's beyond the point. The next time I saw him was queerer still. I'd been to some

military manœuvres, between Berlin and Stettin, and after they were over, I decided to drive on to Stettin for the night, as I'd never been there, and it was a little the nearer of the two. I was with a young English journalist, Violet Halliday, to whom Christopher Semple had given me a letter, in her car. I was taking turns with the driving, and suddenly she said, 'Zoe, I have the strangest feeling that we're being followed. The car that's behind us now has been keeping an even distance for about fifty kilometres.' The *Reichsautobahn* is a very straight stretch between the two cities, and cars usually play a sort of game, spurring ahead of each other, so a performance such as she described wouldn't be apt to seem accidental. I began to watch the car behind us myself and presently I decided she was right. Then I tried to see what the driver looked like in my rear-view mirror, and lo and behold! here was Schmidty again."

"Zoe, you're making this up as you go along."

"You haven't heard the half of it yet, dearie. A few nights later, I saw him at Ciro's, in Berlin. He was in civvies that time, and he came and asked me to dance. I accepted with alacrity, because while you're talking about what a good dancer his wife was, I might mention that he's always shaken a wicked hoof himself. Besides, I was intrigued. I inquired how he'd enjoyed the manœuvres, and he gave me an oblique look and no direct answer, and I thought I'd lost him for good then. But soon after that Violet asked me if I wouldn't motor down to Bad Homburg with her. She wanted to see it, because Edward VII used to go there all the time, which didn't seem to me much of a reason, but apparently she admired him and felt it was more or less sacred to his memory; and she insisted it would be a good place for me to go for my health. Of course, hardly anyone does go there any more, especially out of season, but I didn't care much where I went, at that stage, so I said all right. And we were hardly settled in our nice Edwardian rooms, when I stepped out on our little tin balcony to have a look-see, and there, directly underneath, getting out of a very snappy Mercedes, was my S.S. friend again."

"It's no use telling you I don't believe you. I'm just waiting to see how good your German geography is, for I don't believe there can be many more German cities that you could think up for rendezvous."

"There's only one at the moment, and prosaically enough, that was Munich. I came face to face with Schmidty in the lounge of the Vier Jahreszeiten. That time I asked him how Minna and the little one were getting along, and how he could bear to be separated from them so much. The look he gave me then wasn't oblique, it was downright dirty."

"I should think it might have been. That sounds like your old style, Zoe. You don't seriously believe Schmidt was told to follow

you from one end of Germany to the other, do you, after that first chance encounter?"

"I don't know what to believe. You can draw your own conclusions. I'll tell you another story, though, that isn't problematical. It's just appalling."

"I'm listening to you."

"I saw a dress in Braun's window that I liked very much. Do you know about Braun's?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Good Lord, I suppose you don't even know about Wertheim's or Mosse's! Braun's is a very good speciality shop for women in Berlin. If you go back there, you might buy me something at Braun's."

"All right, I will."

"Well, I went in and tried on this dress, but it was too big for me. The *vendeuse* was very handsome—dark, with creamy skin and large velvety eyes. She was very efficient too. She said the dress could easily be altered, and she got hold of a fitter and had it pinned up on me. It was agreed I was to go back the next day for a final fitting."

"And you did?"

"Yes, I did. But my *vendeuse* had disappeared. A plump blonde waited on me instead, a big fat fool. I asked for the one I liked several times. I thought if I could get hold of her, I might buy something more. I was short of clothes. But the buxom beauty kept putting me off. She said my *vendeuse* was indisposed, that she hadn't come in that day. At last she went out to prepare the sales slip for the customs, and the minute she was gone, the fitter took the pins out of her mouth and said to me in a frightened undertone and a very marked accent, 'Madame! Fräulein Goetz was discharged last night. Herr Braun has kept her as long as possible. But when orders came from the Gestapo a second time, he did not dare keep her. She does not look like a Jewess, but she is.'"

"The poor girl!"

"Yes. It made me feel very sad. I asked the fitter if she knew Fräulein Goetz' address, and she said she did. She managed to slip it to me, on a dingy little scrap of paper, when I bent over to show her an uneven place on the hem. That evening I looked up the address. It was an apartment house, and the name Goetz was on a card over one of the little pushbuttons in the vestibule. When I pressed the button, the inner door opened, but when I got upstairs no one came out to meet me, and there were no names on the doors, the way there usually are, to correspond with the ones downstairs. There were two doors on the landing and I didn't know which one to try. There was absolutely dead silence. At last I took a chance and knocked on the right-hand one. I knocked three times. And still there was that same dead silence."

"Didn't it give you an awfully weird feeling?"

"Yes. But I couldn't have gone away. The thought of that poor girl haunted me. And at last, after I had waited and waited, someone came creeping up to the inside of the door and said in a hollow voice, 'Who is there?'"

"I hope you didn't give your name."

"No, I didn't. I just said, 'An American lady who wants to talk to you about a dress.' Then the door opened and there was my *vendeuse*. She'd been crying, but she'd been packing too. There were several suitcases in the bare little hall. An older woman was there also, her mother. She did look like a Jewess. The sombre cultured kind. They had passports—they'd got those, expecting an emergency, before it became as difficult as it is now. And they had a relative in Holland to whom they'd wired. They knew they couldn't take any money out of the country. They were reconciled to that, but they didn't know about getting over the border in a train and the idea of trying to do this terrified them. So I asked them how they'd like to go in my car."

"But you didn't have any car!"

"No, but Violet did. I felt sure she'd lend it to me. In fact, I thought she'd like to go along, for the adventure, if not for any other reason. And I thought she and I could help each other with the driving, the way we had when we went to Stettin and Bad Homburg. It's a long way from Berlin to the Dutch frontier."

"If your friend Schmidtty really had been trailing you, it would've been grand all around if he'd get on your track this time!"

"Yes, wouldn't it? But he didn't. Fräulein Goetz and I arranged to meet at eight in the morning, which she thought would be an inconspicuous time, and we chose an inconspicuous place. Violet was thrilled to go along, as I knew she would be. We had no trouble at all getting over the border. We found the Goetz' relative, and then Violet and I stayed in Holland three days and came back by a different route. We went to Doorn in the meantime and saw the ex-Kaiser. The whole trip was very well worthwhile."

"Maybe. You make a good story of it. One that'll sell when you write it, instead of just telling it to me. But I think you'd better stay out of Germany from now on."

She did not argue the point with him. Instead, she spoke to him about Isabel de Palencia, the woman who had been Spanish Minister to Sweden, whose story was another he ought to run down, she said; again he agreed with her. After that, he could tell that she was beginning to grow sleepy; she did not talk any more, and presently she pressed his hand, drew her own away, and turned over on her side. Her breathing began to come quietly and regularly, like a child's, and he left her room and went into his

own, thankful that the episode he had dreaded had ended comparatively easily. Zoe did not mention Ronnie's twins again nor did she ask, immediately, any more questions about Helen. But Bob was sure her silence represented nothing more than a reprieve for him and he was right. Two days later, on the terrace, she spoke once more of her sister-in-law.

"You didn't finish telling me about Helen the other day, Bob. Did she find someone to go with her to Mexico? Someone of her own age, I mean, in my place?"

"Well, not exactly her own age. But she finally took Isabel."

"Isabel! How on earth could Isabel leave the French Embassy?"

"She has left it. For good, I mean. She isn't the social secretary there any more."

"What happened?"

"I don't know the details. But you guessed yourself, long ago, that she and the Ambassador didn't always agree about lists. It seems these disagreements kept getting more frequent. And I believe there were other complications."

"What kind of complications?"

"I think they more or less centred around Giles Arnold, Zoe."

She did not instantly answer, but neither did she turn away, and when Bob hazarded a covert glance at her, he saw that she was smiling.

"Dearest, don't look so frightened! I promise you I won't have hysterics again. I'm still terribly ashamed of having been such an awful fool the other day. But I'm dying to hear about this. Do go on."

"Well, you know Giles and René de Blonville have been good friends for a long time, and it's natural they should see a lot of each other and want to. It's also natural for the Ambassador to want to entertain Giles at the Embassy. I don't need to tell you that Giles is an asset to any party, and he speaks such beautiful French, and understands French psychology so well, that he's a very special asset at a party given by French people. Besides, he's growing more important, officially, all the time. So René and the Ambassador started in to have him around a lot. And eventually they gathered that it was awkward for him to come because of Isabel."

"I should think Giles would have had enough *savoir faire* to handle a situation like that without letting it get awkward for anybody."

"Oh, Giles didn't fall down in the matter of *savoir faire*. It was Isabel. Hers seems to be wearing rather thin. At first she treated him with marked coldness. When he didn't pay the slightest attention to that, she tried another tack—great effusiveness and finally an appealing wistfulness. None of that worked so well either. Giles was very, very courteous to her. But apparently he managed to make it clear that his affections were now engaged

elsewhere. At least, this is what I've gathered from what Helen's written me."

"How did Helen happen to know so much about it?"

"Well, partly because Helen seems to get around a good deal these days. She's in and out of several embassies, the French Embassy among them, and she couldn't help overhearing some of these little passages of arms between Isabel and Giles. And as she happens to be the latest lady on Giles' list, perhaps you'll begin to see what I mean about complications."

"Bob, this is simply priceless. I'll never forgive you for keeping it from me all this time."

"How could I tell how you'd take it? I didn't know you'd just laugh and laugh. Besides, it isn't easy for me to talk about Giles Arnold. Perhaps you'll understand that much anyway."

"There's no reason why it shouldn't be, Bob. No reason at all. It needn't be hard for you to talk about him because of anything that happened eight years ago, or because of anything you said or did last spring either. Would life be pleasanter for you if you believed that?"

"Of course it would, Zoe. But——"

"Then please believe it, dearest. Because I mean it. Come here. Kiss me."

"Zoe, it isn't as easy as all that. And yet what can I say about it? Except that I'm so sorry and ashamed I don't know what to do."

"That's the only thing you do need to say. And now you've said it. I know it anyhow. So let's forget about it. Not that I don't think it's sweet of you to have said it, too."

Apparently they were fated to leave the subject of Helen unfinished, for they did not talk about her any more that evening either, being entirely occupied with each other. But Zoe did not allow so long a time to elapse, in this instance, before bringing up the subject again. The next afternoon she asked Bob to tell her the rest of the story.

"There really wasn't much more. Except that the Ambassador joined the little after-dinner group, very inopportunately, one evening when Giles was trying to talk to Helen, and Isabel was trying to talk to Giles. The situation didn't appeal to Monsieur Cauteret at all. So shortly after that he suggested to Isabel that her services, which certainly would be invaluable elsewhere, were now superfluous as far as he was concerned. And Isabel went to Helen with her hard luck story."

"She couldn't have been such a simpleton as to let Isabel take her in!"

"I don't think anyone ever took Helen in. She isn't a simpleton at all. We've all made a good many mistakes about that. But she

does have a very kind heart; she hasn't forgotten that Isabel used to do nice things for her, and she's willing to overlook the fact that most of them were done with an ulterior motive. I think her sympathies were especially touched off when she found Isabel had slept in a bed in the ballroom at the Leesburg Inn the night of one of the races. You know that little alcove space they have to make use of in crowded times. I think myself she was lucky that she didn't have to sleep at the undertaker's—lots of other people did. But she took it for granted she'd stay at Hunter's Green, which was bulging already, and Welby was trying to keep Ronnie quiet and put his foot down. So Isabel acted like a martyr, and Helen suggested to her that it might be a good plan all around if they went to Mexico together. It does seem funny to think of Isabel acting as Helen's duenna, when you think of their conduct comparatively; but I've always had my own opinion of duennas, as far as that goes, and it was Helen's idea that any malicious gossip would be silenced if Isabel were a guest in her house. Helen was right. It was. The Ambassador thought it was a stroke of genius; I understand that his opinion of Helen, which was high already, has now gone up several notches more. And Isabel jumped at the chance of such a plausible excuse for leaving Washington and of living in such luxury. I believe the only person who isn't so pleased with the plan is Giles. He was intending to fly down to Mexico every time he could get a long week-end off. And speaking of complications, there's no denying that one exists if a man's former mistress and future bride are keeping house together."

"No, I wouldn't attempt to deny that there might be. But I don't imagine that Giles' discomfiture is worrying Helen much."

"Oh, not at all. She's too much preoccupied in too many other directions."

"Then you don't think Giles really has a chance of getting her?"

"Yes. I still think he has a chance. But I don't think he'd better betray too much displeasure, no matter what she does. Because I think Helen intends to do exactly as she pleases, not only about Isabel, but about everyone and everything. And I think Giles had better make the grade when the Selection Board meets. Because Helen's had her great romance. That's all behind her. When she marries the next time, she intends to make a 'suitable' match, with a vengeance. She might possibly consider an admiral, but a mere captain wouldn't have a look-in."

"I see. And where does Guy come in?"

"I wish I knew. That's what I'd like, of course. But, correspondingly, he ought to be a peer of the realm."

Zoe met Bob's smile with an answering one. But apparently Helen's affairs afforded her more amusement than concern. She ran her fingers through his, and still holding them, asked one of her inconsequential questions.

"Do you suppose there would be any hope at all of getting the Lichtensteins out of our house before fall, Bob?"

"I don't know. Of course, I haven't tried to sound them out. But I did hear they were talking about buying a yacht. If they had a yacht anchored in the Potomac, perhaps they wouldn't need a house, too. Perhaps they could get along with an apartment."

"Well, write and ask them, will you? Because I'd like very much to go back to the house, as soon as I'm well enough, and you've been to Spain, and done everything else you ought to over here."

In spite of himself, his fingers stiffened a little in hers. She pressed them, as she had formed a habit of doing, drawing them closer again, and looking at him searchingly.

"You'd like me to come back, wouldn't you, Bob?"

"You know I would."

"Then——"

"You've sort of taken me by surprise, Zoe. I haven't felt sure you wanted to go back to the house. I know you've always felt something was missing there. I thought perhaps you'd like to sell it and get another house somewhere, smaller and different. A smart town house, perhaps."

"No, I don't want to sell it. I don't want anything smaller and different and I certainly don't want anything smarter. Besides, I don't think I'll always feel there's something missing there."

"But you've never been happy there. I haven't made you happy there. I'm afraid now that I never could."

"You don't need to be afraid of that, do you, if I'm not?"

"Yes. Because I've reasons for being afraid that you don't know about, Zoe. I haven't told you about them yet. I've been waiting for you to get well first. But I couldn't let you come back and work with me again and live with me again, unless I did tell you."

"You don't need to tell me anything, as far as I'm concerned. You couldn't tell me anything that would make me feel I didn't want to come back and work with you and live with you again. But if it'll make you feel any better, you can tell me whatever you like. I know telling helps sometimes. That's the reason I happened to stay here. Because I found that 'confession is good for the soul' isn't just a phrase. It's a home truth."

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Zoe."

"Well, you do know that I came over here from Pau just to do some sightseeing. And then, after Mère Marie Alphonse had shown me around the hospital, she asked me to come into the parlour and have a glass of wine and a biscuit. So I did. Of course I was sick already. I was feverish. You can put it down to that if you like."

"I know you were sick, darling. You were terribly sick. I'm sure she saved your life by keeping you here."

"Well, I'm sure she saved more than my life. She saved my—

whatever you choose to call it if you don't like the word soul. Probably I haven't any right to talk about having a soul. Probably I'll always be a mean vengeful creature. I've shown you that I still could be, even these last few days, in spite of all my good resolutions. But anyway, that day I came here, I suddenly felt that everything would be different if I could tell Mère Marie Alphonse how hounded and troubled I was, and how many things I'd done that I shouldn't, and how the bottom had dropped out of the world because I'd lost you——"

"Hush, darling, you haven't done anything you shouldn't. And you know you haven't lost me, that you couldn't lose me on a bet, if you'll let me stay with you after you know all about what a damn fool I've been. But you promised me you wouldn't cry any more."

"I'm not crying. That is, not to speak of. I'm just explaining, or trying to explain. I did tell Mère Marie Alphonse everything. And I did feel better. At least, I had pneumonia, but that didn't matter, compared to what I'd been through before. It was as if a great load had rolled away. So if you would feel better to tell me something——"

"This wouldn't be like what you told Mère Marie Alphonse. You were just lonely and unhappy and sick. You hadn't done anything wrong. But I have."

"All right then, you have. Now you've told me that. So then what?"

"So then you wouldn't come back to me if you knew what it was. You wouldn't marry Giles when you found out what he'd done. And this was much worse."

"Maybe. But it was different. It was different for two reasons."

"You don't know what you're saying. What do you mean, it was different for two reasons?"

"I mean it was partly my fault in your case; it wasn't in Giles'. That makes a lot of difference. And you needn't say that it wasn't partly my fault, because I know it was, whatever you did. I know you were lonely and disheartened and embittered. I know you felt as if I'd failed you, in almost every way that I shouldn't have. I did let you down, badly, after I promised that I wouldn't. We can't either of us get away from that, Bob, if we're honest with each other. And we better be honest now, because if we're not, we may never have another chance. We're mighty lucky to have had this one. It was touch and go for a long while, whether we would or not. Aren't you too thankful that we did to run risks with it?"

"I'm too thankful to want to run risks with it. But I'm trying hard to be honest myself, Zoe. I've let you down too, a thousand times worse than you did me."

"Do you think you're likely to let me down again?"

"Good God, no!"

"Then you might ask me what the other reason is why this case is different. Or at least you might listen to me while I tell you."

"I am listening. I'm not sure I have any right to, but I am."

"The other reason is that I love you and that I didn't love Giles. If you needed to have that proved to you, this ought to do it. Because it's true that I couldn't forgive him. But it's also true that I can't help forgiving you, no matter what—no matter——"

She was not pretending any more about crying. She was weeping unrestrainedly. But it did not seem to matter very much, because she was crying with her arms around his neck and her head on his shoulder. He could not see her tears, he could only feel her dependence and her trust. And he knew there was nothing more for him to say.

CHAPTER XXXV

"Zoe," Mrs. Morton said insistently, "Zoe. Is there anything the matter with this line? Are you listening to me?"

"I don't think there's anything the matter with the line, Mrs. Morton. I'll have it tested, if you like. But I'm listening, and I can hear you very well."

"Then I wish you would answer me, my dear. It may be an idiosyncrasy of mine, but I have a very strong dislike to receiving no answer when I've asked a direct question."

"I didn't understand that you'd asked a direct question. I thought you'd only made a plain statement. Perhaps I didn't hear everything after all."

"I said that your father-in-law and I had not been invited to the garden party at the British Embassy in honour of the King and Queen, that it was an outrage, and I felt something should be done about it."

"Yes. I heard that. I thought that was the plain statement."

"Zoe, I dislike very much to seem critical, and I'm sure you know how hard I try never to sit in judgment on anyone. But certainly you must have realized I meant I would like to have you do something about it."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Morton, but I didn't. I don't know just what I can do about it. I'm on pretty good terms with all the other embassies, and on a pinch, I could talk to someone and indicate how you feel. It might not do any good, but I could try. There's no one at the British Embassy I can talk to though. I had a lot of difficulty the last time I went there to get a visa, and you know it was only through the kindness of the Bishop of Washington that Bob got in to the Memorial Service for George V. He was turned down flat when he tried to make arrangements through the Embassy, and so was Father when he tried to help Bob out. Bob and I aren't invited to the garden party ourselves. No one at our office is. Brenda's going—one society editor on each Washington paper has been included on the list. I've asked her if she wouldn't help me out, and she's been very nice about it. I never like to use a story unless one of us has done the covering, but I don't see how it can be helped this time. Of course, the readers of our syndicate want a piece about that party."

"I thought if I explained this slight which has been shown to your father-in-law and myself, and to the state he represents, and to the dignity of the Senate generally, that possibly you'd write something yourself—in your old vein, you know. Not a news story,

but a comment on the ridiculously stiff attitude of the British Embassy. There's no one who could write it better than you, Zoe. I think it might be instrumental in making someone in authority reconsider. And it would rouse the country to the way the Senate's been treated by——"

"Members of the Foreign Relations Committee have been invited, haven't they? And the chairmen of all other committees? And in most cases their wives? I believe there were a few omissions in the case of the ladies, but these were careless and not intentional and they've all been rectified now."

"Yes, those persons have been invited. In a sort of helter-skelter way, but still it's been done. And think how they're crowing over the rest of us! Why, at last Tuesday's luncheon of the Ladies of the Senate the wives of the members of the Foreign Relations Committee and the wives of the committee chairmen got together in a little bunch, and discussed whether they should wear long dresses or short, and whether they should get picture hats and parasols too. Of course, no one's worn a picture hat or carried a parasol since I can remember, but it's rumoured that's what the Queen's going to do, and these senators' wives want to conform. They talked about it for so long that they held the luncheon up, and then trickled out among the rest of us, and in the worst possible taste talked and *talked* about their invitations to this garden party. I never felt so humiliated in my life. I've always told your father-in-law he should have gone on the Foreign Relations Committee instead of the Committee on Appropriations. There's absolutely no prestige to appropriations. They're just made, that's all, more and more of them all the time."

"Well, you know Father's done awfully good work on that committee. And there's a limit, after all, to the number of major committees a man is allowed to serve on. I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. Morton, but I'm afraid I can't write the sort of piece you have in mind. You know you didn't use to like them very well yourself. Now I'm out of practice and I couldn't put any personal feeling into a piece like that. It wouldn't have any sting to it. I don't mind at all because I haven't been invited to the party."

"Zoe, I'm very, very much disappointed. I thought I could count on your co-operation. I really did. I still hope so. I hope when you've slept on this you'll realize how important it is. I hope you'll see that this outrage has proper publicity. I hope——"

"If it's any comfort to you, I'm sure lots of other people will write exactly the sort of piece you have in mind. Because the feminine press as a whole is pretty mad. I don't happen to be, that's all. I'm going to England fairly soon, as you know, and I'm expecting to have a grand time there—visiting at Star Hundred, and seeing my publishers in London, and doing the things I really enjoy. I've had lots of good times in England, and I expect to have

a lot more. I've even been fortunate enough to have a British King for a friend. I don't see why I should worry because I can't stand somewhere in the same garden with this King, especially when the garden's about as cosy as a ball park."

"I should think you'd feel the slight to the press even if you don't feel the slight to the Senate. Your bureau's a very important organization, and you say not a single member——"

"It's just because it's important that I think it can stagger along all right under this slight, as you call it. My theory is that when persons and organizations are really important, they don't do much worrying over slights. I believe we've agreed before to disagree about that. Let me give you one more crumb of comfort, and then, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll have to ring off. We're having twenty people in to dinner tonight, and there're still several housewifely details I ought to attend to. But I hear through the grapevine that the Chairman of Foreign Relations is doing his level best to arrange that all the senators and all their wives shall be invited to the garden party. So you may get there yet. Because, as you know, he's a very persuasive person. He could charm a bird off a bush when he's in the mood. And I believe he's in the mood right now."

Zoe hung up the receiver, and went slowly down the stairway, the smile which had always intrigued Bob twisting the corners of her lips. There was really not very much to be done about the dinner. The house was spotless, the flowers arranged in the library and the drawing-room, the supply of cigarettes everywhere adequate; the tables were set and decorated, both in the dining-room leading by a flight of short steps from the drawing-room—in the same manner that the old nursery led out of the main bedroom—and in the "taproom" beyond, which Zoe had fashioned from the original winter kitchen. The present kitchen, once a shed-like structure at the end of the building, where laundry work and preserving were done, and in the summer time some cooking, was now equipped in the most modern manner, and at the moment was teeming with activity; but all preparations for the feast were well in hand. Zoe did not go in for elaborate menus, but stuck to the dishes for which Pearl Gray showed a special genius. Tonight there would be a lobster chowder, roast duck with nut dressing and baked oranges, wild rice enlivened by chopped pimentos, fresh asparagus on toast, green salad mixed with a variety of vinegars and imported olive oil, home-made strawberry ice cream and hot sponge cakes. Throughout the meal hot biscuits dripping with butter would appear in relays, and there would be relishes, jellies, pickles and cheeses. With Pearl Gray's inimitable mint juleps served in the garden beforehand, Chablis with the lobster, Pomard with the duck, and champagne, which had already been on ice all day, beginning its appearance with the salad, not to men-

tion the Grand Marnier, which would come in with the nectar-like coffee after dinner, Zoe was not afraid that the most critical of her guests would feel the lack of anything that she could possibly provide.

The electric clock, gleaming above the glazed and snowy range, confirmed her impression that there was still an hour to spare before Bob would be back from the office, or before she would need to dress. She went out in the garden, and lay down on a swinging seat, calling to Pearl Gray to take a look at her around seven and make sure she was not asleep. She herself had not been to the office at all that afternoon, for she had never been able to swing back fully into the stride that had been her normal pace before her long illness. Even now, she still tired easily, she still coughed if she caught the slightest cold, she still found tension of any sort extremely taxing. She had been obliged to fight against annoyance and discouragement because all this was so, but she had finally accepted it as inevitable with a philosophy which was fairly steadfast. After all, there had been a great many compensations for her crippled career, and when exhaustion overwhelmed her, as it had so inopportunately just now, she could nearly always summon the strength to go on by lying down quietly and confining her idle thoughts to her happiness with her husband and to the success which had so surprisingly come to her in an unsought and unexpected field.

There had never been any estrangement or any misunderstanding between Bob and herself since they had so tardily come close to each other, in mind and spirit, on the tranquil twilit terrace at Lourdes. Not that they had been without separations to face and adjustments to make. Indeed, these had begun almost instantly, for Bob had finally agreed with Zoe that the best time for him to take his trip to Spain was while she could still stay on at the Clinic; when she had more completely recovered, the Sisters could no longer logically be expected to keep her there, and she would be very lonely in a hotel, or even in an apartment of her own. The idea that he might entirely abandon the survey in Spain, when it was so obviously indicated, from a journalistic standpoint, never occurred to her, and he knew that he could not fail to fulfil the standard she had set for him. He left her, aware that this was the way to hold her, and that she was happy to be so held.

When he returned she had already moved, with Doctor Higgins' consent and Sister Agnes' help, to a small furnished villa which she had found in Pau, and she made his return seem like a homecoming. With characteristic skill she had given the villa the touches that it needed to redeem it from barrenness and banality, Mère Marie Alphonse had loaned her Solange for the period of her sojourn there, and Sister Agnes was staying on, a watchful but unobtrusive guardian of Zoe's convalescence. Bob had found his

experience in Germany repeated, in a certain sense, in Spain; again he had soaked up impressions and information like a sponge, and again he was able to keep on squeezing these out, and putting them down on paper, over a fairly long period. Zoe did not write as intensively as he did, but she sat beside him in the sunshine, while he pounded out his pieces, and in the meantime her own work on her book went forward steadily, if slowly. When he left her, early in the new year, to revisit Germany and to see what was happening in Austria, Zoe was able to tell him, with sincerity, that the final chapters would absorb her while he was gone. When he came back, several weeks later, the manuscript, which in book form had been named "Vagrant Cherry," had been mailed in its entirety, and received, with enthusiasm, in Fleet Street, and Zoe was drafting another short story, inspired by Mère Marie Alphonse, which she called "In Need of Confession," and which Bob promptly pronounced the most beautiful and moving she had done yet.

Bob brought her firsthand inside news to which she listened with excitement: Austria was undoubtedly in a very bad way; Schuschnigg had resisted Italy's wily efforts to draw Austria away from the League of Nations, but on the other hand he had appointed an out-and-out Nazi, Seyss-Inquart, to his Cabinet; propaganda and treachery were both doing their insidious work, and Bob had watched the effect; the inevitable end could not be far off. In Germany itself persecution was reaching new heights; Niemöller was in jail, von Blomberg ruined and Hitler's fulminations against Anthony Eden had undoubtedly been responsible for the British Foreign Secretary's forced resignation. Bob had found his feet in Europe now. He was no longer bewildered and baulked by the complexities of the general situation; he was beginning to grasp it intelligently, to analyze it well, and to find it indescribably thrilling. Zoe went so far as to suggest that perhaps they had better not go home at all. Everything seemed to be running on greased wheels at the Washington bureau; the Lichtensteins had declined to give up their lease on the Alexandria house until May, when their new yacht would be ready; then soon it would be summer, and there were prospects that the third session of the Seventy-Fifth Congress might actually adjourn by June. If this forecast were correct it would mean that Bob would, or should, be back on the Continent before mid-summer. Was it really worth while to cross the Atlantic twice in such a short space of time?

Zoe could see that her line of reasoning appealed to him, but, after all, he decided in favour of adhering to their original plan of working their way slowly across the French Riviera to Italy, as soon as she was well enough to stand the trip, and taking the Mediterranean route home. It was true that Bert and the girls had done a swell job at the bureau; but, after all, Bob had been away nearly a year now, and none of them had been able to take a vacation in

the meantime. It wasn't fair to keep their noses to the grindstone indefinitely, like that; besides, Beverley had been offered a swell job in Cincinnati; she'd only stayed on to take his place. He ought to get back and release her——

"Did you tell me about this Cincinnati job before, Bob? I don't seem to remember. And I don't see how we could possibly get along without Beverley."

"Well, I'm afraid we've got to. She's made up her mind to leave."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Because I don't know where we'd find anyone to touch her, in her line. I'll see if there isn't something I can say, when we do get home. But you're right. If Beverley's leaving the bureau, we've got to get back to it."

She said no more, either about prolonging their absence or about averting Beverley's departure, but began to tell him her own more slender stock of news. She had received a characteristic letter from Helen, who had extended her triumphant stay in Mexico until the beginning of the hunting season, when she had gone back to the remodelled school house at Hunter's Green. She was still there, with no definite plans for the coming summer, and she had not yet made up her mind whom she wanted to marry, if anyone. But she had enclosed a clipping, which Zoe thought might have some bearing on this state of indecision. Zoe handed it to Bob with a smile.

"CONRAD MAKES NAVY PROMOTIONS"—he read—

"LINE BOARD'S CHOICE FOR EIGHT

REAR ADMIRALS AND 28 COM-

MANDERS ARE APPROVED.

WILL AWAIT VACANCIES.

Former aide to President Shaw and several decorated for war service among the selections.

Recommendations for the line selection board transmitted to the Secretary of the Navy for the promotion of eight captains to be rear admirals and twenty-eight commanders to be captains were approved today by President Conrad.

The promotions take effect as fast as vacancies occur. The selection board, headed by Rear Admiral Jason T. Mears, Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet, has been meeting daily since Dec. 3 at the Navy Dept. considering qualifications.

The captains selected for promotion to rear admiral are:
Giles Arnold—Bureau of Navigation.
Former aide to President Shaw.
Naval attache in Paris 1929. Chief
American Naval Mission to Peru
1935-37. Home, Washington.
George Barnard—on duty in Office of
Chief of Naval Operations——"

Bob looked up from the clipping with amusement. "So Giles made it," he said. "Mears was the man whose apartment he had while he was waiting for the verdict about his 'shanghai post,' wasn't he? I thought so. Well, that was a break for Giles. And I notice the Guantanamo interlude isn't among those publicized—— So you're betting Helen will bide her time until it's evident when these vacancies are going to occur and where Giles is ordered next?"

"Exactly. Of course, Giles is probably screaming to get to sea by this time, on his own initiative, aside from the fact that he's had all the shore duty that's coming to him at present in the natural course of events. He wouldn't be true to type if he weren't, lady love or no lady love. And I don't think it would suit Helen at all to be a grass widow for two years, after being a real widow for over four. So his promotion may not do him much good after all, as far as she's concerned. And then Guy would have his big chance."

"And where would Dabney come in?"

"Oh, I rather think Dabney came in chiefly to guide her away from weeping willows to fresh fields and pastures new. I think if he were ever going to succeed in doing more than that, he'd have done it by this time. After all, this is his second season, and Helen's list has been growing longer and longer all the time. No, I'm afraid we're not going to have another country squire in the family, pleasant as that would be."

"What do you mean, another?"

"Why, I always think of Welby as a member of the family now, don't you? By the way, Ronnie has named the twins after Jett and Stewart. I think that's awfully sweet of her. Helen says the two old boys are tickled to death."

"Well, it was a nice gesture—— Did Helen take her duenna along to Hunter's Green?"

"No, Isabel's gone to Mrs. Lichtenstein, at a higher salary than she would have had at the White House, to say nothing of the salary she had at the French Embassy."

"You don't mean to tell me *she's* living in our house?"

"Hush, dearest, don't get so excited. It's only for a little while. She can't live there after we get back."

"I wouldn't put it past her to try. But if she does, she'll find herself evicted. If you begin to be sorry for Isabel, too, Zoe, that will be the last straw."

"I am sorry for her. How could I help being sorry for her? Don't you think it's pitiful to see any woman who had everything worth living for—breeding and beauty and money and position—lose them all and slide further and further down the ladder of life?"

"No, not if she's thrown them away with both hands. But hell, don't let's talk about Isabel. Let's talk about your book. How soon do you think you'll get your galley?"

She got it the next week, and Bob helped her with the proof reading, in much the same spirit that she helped him with the background and build-up of his articles on Spain and Germany. The memory of their twin tables, set out in the sun beside the little villa, and of the proofing and writing they had done there together, was one of those on which Zoe most loved to dwell, when she looked back on that period in Pau. For the first time, they had worked not as rivals, but as partners; instead of striving against each other, they had reached towards adjoining stars. As long as they could do that, and could keep the deeper harmony they had achieved, she knew that their marriage would stand up against any strain and any separation.

Concerning that deeper harmony, Zoe's mind was wholly untroubled, for it was not only about their common work in Pau that Zoe loved to think now. Still closer to her heart, she hugged the memory of Bob's return from Spain, when she had told him that though Sister Agnes would still remain on call, hereafter she would not sleep in her patient's room any longer. Bob was to be the "night nurse" now—that is, if he were willing to take over the job. She led him upstairs, after proudly showing him how she had transformed the stiff little French salon into the semblance of an American living-room, and took him into the big room, with a little balcony facing the mountains leading out of it. This was hers, she said, and the smaller one, which adjoined it and which faced the town, would be his, if he would like it. She told him that after she had taken her medicine at ten o'clock, there was nothing to do for her any more until she had her morning coffee, unless she were wakeful or restless or uncomfortable for any reason, in which case she would call him, or unless she had a bad attack of coughing, which he would not be able to help hearing. But on the whole, she was sleeping fairly well; and she had thought it would be much more like old times if they did not have a nurse around, if they were by themselves.

He had nodded, understandingly, and then he had put his arm around her and laid his cheek against hers for a moment before he

turned his face and kissed her. He would do his best to take good care of her, he told her huskily; and, indeed, he always heard her stirring, and came to her before she had a chance to call him, when she was restless during the night, sitting beside her and holding her hand until she was quiet again. When she coughed, he supported her, until the dreadful paroxysms were over, and she leaned against him like a tired trustful child. As she grew gradually better, and slept for longer and longer intervals, he complained that she was not giving him a chance to earn his salt, as a nurse; and she said, smiling back at him, that presently she would not need a nurse any more, and that she would try to find something else for him to do, after he returned from Germany.

Sister Agnes had gone for good, Zoe told him when he did come back. He was right. She did not need a nurse any longer. But she hoped he would not desert her entirely, because she had missed him while he was gone and had been looking forward to having him around again. After she had gone upstairs that night, before it occurred to him that she could need anything, she had called him and asked him to come into her room. Then as he sat on the edge of her bed and took her hand, she made an arch inquiry.

"Would you be terribly shocked if I made amorous advances to you?"

His heart missed a beat, but he tried to speak lightly too. "Not terribly shocked. But absolutely stunned, in view of your natural elusiveness."

She did not remind him that there had already been a tragic exception to this elusiveness, but he himself remembered, almost as soon as he had spoken, and his face grew very grave. She disregarded the gravity.

"I think you'd find my complete subjugation very easy. Perhaps so easy that it wouldn't even intrigue you."

"Please don't talk that way, darling. You know how much your generosity must mean to me, coming on top of everything that's happened. But I can't take advantage of it, or of your recklessness either."

"Why not, Bob?"

He could not tell her that between them he seemed to see the shadow of Beverley, from whom he had taken everything and to whom he had given nothing, and also the vision of her own persistent fragility, rising to reproach him. He could not tell her either that his old horror of childbirth still clutched at his heart, and that he knew, though she did not say so, the one price she would set on their reunion would be his promise that he would no longer try to avert that risk. But while he sat silent and unhappy, she spoke to him with courage and candour, far more moving than any mock modesty could have been.

"Bob, you must tell me the truth. It hasn't been easy for me to

“speak to you first, instead of waiting for you to speak to me. But I’ve been afraid that you wouldn’t do that, that you’d hesitate because you think I’m not very strong yet, and that you don’t want to hurry me or importune me. But it’s only fair to tell you, that if you want to come back to me, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t, any more.”

“Are you sure, Zoe? Because if anything happened, after all you’ve been through, to upset you or—or hurt you, I’d never forgive myself.”

“Yes, I’m sure. I’ve spoken to the doctor myself. His attitude was very cautious at first. He said I could probably stand it. So I told him I didn’t belong to the old school of conscientious but reluctant wives. I said I didn’t regard this as an endurance test, but as the realization of rapture. Then he grew a little less gruff. Of course he gave me a great deal of fatherly advice, and——”

“What was the fatherly advice?”

“Do you really want me to tell you? All at once? Wouldn’t it do if I passed it along a little at a time? Provided I gave you my word that what I’ve told you so far is true?”

“Yes, if you gave me your word.”

“All right. I do give it. With all my heart and soul. Of course, those are yours too.”

There was no fear in her being now, no flaw in her joy. The shadows of his sin and her suffering, which he could see standing between them, as he took her in his arms with such gentleness as he had never shown before, were blessedly invisible to her eyes. She had divined the sin, and she knew it for what it was. She had experienced the suffering, and she was inviting more. Yet neither one rose up to hurt her now.

The spell of this first recaptured ecstasy was still strong upon her when they started their long leisurely voyage home, and it remained unbroken. The passage was smooth and sunny, and the private verandah, open to the ocean, enabled them to spend endless hours which only the sea and the sky seemed to limit, alternately working and resting and making love to each other; and at the frequent ports of call they wandered through the fascinating cities that were strange to them both with carefree enjoyment. They had started back a little ahead of their original schedule, and because she was so wholly happy, Zoe dared to jest about this, and to accuse Bob of having advanced the date of their sailing, because he was unreasonably annoyed at the idea of Isabel luxuriating in their house, when he wanted to revel in it himself instead. More seriously she admitted that the disquieting news they had received about Mexico’s seizure of all foreign oil properties, and the effect this might have on the inheritance Helen had turned over to her father, might have something to do with his decision; and in the

deep contentment of her homecoming, she was herself delighted that this had been no more delayed in any case. Pearl Gray and Opal and Zallie were already installed at the Alexandria house, and exquisite order reigned; even Mrs. Morton, with an effort Zoe did her best to appreciate, had made a special trip to assure herself that there were enough padded hangers in all the closets. The garden was beautiful with bloom, the last of the iris and the first of the roses mingled together in brilliant profusion. Friends had immediately begun to drop in, mint juleps were stirred to a white frost, yarns spun until long after midnight. Before anyone had made a move to leave, Bob noticed Zoe's telltale signs of exhaustion, and when he thought she was out of earshot, told his cronies that they would have to go slow about big crowds and late hours until she had regained her strength.

"You know I'm tickled to death to have you all here, and so is she. But she hasn't made the kind of a comeback she ought to. I'm going to have another doctor look at her, right away. Maybe, there's a specialist in Washington who can think of something. Do you fellows know of anyone who's unusually good?"

Zoe overheard him, because her fatigue kept her from going up the stairs very fast, and because the door of the drawing-room was a little ajar. But she did not let him know that she had, and the next morning she insisted on going to the office with him. Mary and Bert had both been at the house the night before, but Beverley had not; and when Bob, characteristically, went rushing off to the Hill, as if he had not been out of the thick of things in the Capitol for a single day, Zoe asked Beverley to come in and "go over things" with her. Simultaneously she asked Mary to see that no one except "the boss and the President" was put through to her on the telephone, and settled herself on her own side of the big double desk, to which she had gone back with the same ease that Bob had begun his customary rounds.

"I've got a little present for you, Beverley. Nothing much. I sort of thought you'd drop in at the house with the rest of the crowd, last night, so I had it laid out for you then. I was sorry you didn't. But I brought it in with me today."

Zoe indicated a box done up in gilded paper, with perfumed artificial flowers intertwined among the rainbow-coloured ribbons with which it was tied. While Beverley began to open it, hesitantly, Zoe went on talking.

"Bob says you've had a wonderful offer in Cincinnati, Beverley, that you've only stayed on here until we could get back and take over again. He seems to think you're determined to go. Of course, I don't want to stand in the way of having you get a better job than we can give you. But I do wish you'd let us have a chance to meet this offer."

Beverley, lifting an exquisite enamelled make-up kit from the

shredded silk paper in which it was imbedded, did not answer. Her hands and her lips were both trembling a little.

"I may as well tell you that I'm pretty selfish for being so insistent about this, Beverley. Bob's going back to Europe as soon as Congress adjourns. I don't need to remind you that the situation abroad is getting worse every minute, with the League of Nations conceding Ethiopia to Italy, and the Czechs mobilizing while Henlein yaps for Sudeten independence, and a Labourite in the House of Commons says Continental liberty is dead and Chamberlain's the undertaker. All this is pretty portentous. Bob mustn't miss anything that's happening over there this summer, and that means he probably won't be here more than six or eight weeks. And I don't know whether I can get back into the swing by then or not. I seem to have about as much strength as a sick kitten."

"Yes, Bert told me. At least, he said you had to go to bed last night before they left, and that Bob said you still got tired awfully easily. They were terribly sorry they'd been so inconsiderate. I don't think any of them realized how sick you'd been. I am sure I hadn't—Zoe, this kit is perfectly beautiful. I never saw anything of the kind half so lovely. But I wish you hadn't—"

"If you really like it, don't wish I hadn't, because I had great fun picking it out for you. I've always loved to shop, in Europe. Well, of course I don't want you to think I'm a slacker myself, or that I'm trying to keep you from a better job, as I said before. But if you could stay, at least until fall—"

"No one who ever knew you could possibly think you were a slacker, Zoe. You've worked yourself to death, that's half the trouble. And it isn't that this job in Cincinnati is so much better. It's just that—"

"Perhaps you'll think it over, Beverley, for a day or two. Perhaps you'd like to talk it over with someone."

"Yes, I would. I'd like to think it over and talk it over both. Thanks a lot, Zoe. Which ever way I decide, it means the world to me that you asked me to stay."

Zoe never knew, of course, what Bob and Beverley said to each other that evening. She went home early, after writing a piece analyzing the so-called "escape" of Vargas from the Brazilian Green Shirts, and another analyzing the severance of Anglo-Mexican diplomatic relations because of the oil crisis. She was so tired by the time she had finished these that she could not focus her thoughts or even her eyes on what she was doing any longer. And when Bob came home himself, hours later, he found she was already in bed, half asleep; he knew he had no right to disturb her about anything. He did say, the next morning, "Beverley tells me you've asked her not to go to Cincinnati." And Zoe did answer, "Yes, that's true. I don't see how I can get along without her, this

summer, at the office. Besides, Beverley and I have been friends a long time. It's always hard to lose a friend. I'd like to prevent it, in this case, if I could." But though nothing more was said, after that, Zoe knew, substantially, what must have happened:

"Bob, I've waited to speak to you. I had to. You didn't keep your promise. You didn't tell Zoe."

"I tried to keep my promise, Beverley, I tried to tell her. But she wouldn't let me. She kept stopping me. I told her I'd been a damn fool, and worse, and she said it didn't matter what I'd been or what I'd done, she wanted me back. That is, if I wanted to come. And of course I wanted that more than anything else in the world. As I don't need to tell you."

"Yes, I know. But I don't see how I can stay here and look her in the face, day after day, when——"

"Well, after all, she's looked you in the face, hasn't she? Unreproachfully? Understandingly? Don't think for a moment, Beverley, that she doesn't know what happened just because she wouldn't let me tell her, just because she didn't want it put into words. Of course she knows. But she insists that whatever happened was partly her fault and she doesn't feel any rancour against anyone, or any awkwardness. She isn't jealous. She says she doesn't know what it's like to be jealous—that is, in a case like this—and I believe her. She's jealous of Veronique Hunter because Ronnie has children and she hasn't. She admits that everyone has some sort of a jealous streak. But you needn't be afraid that hers will ever hurt you. Because it won't."

"I'm not afraid. I'm ashamed. She even brought me a present. A perfectly beautiful present. And she kissed me when she came into the office. She put her arms around me and thanked me for standing by and doing such a swell job."

"Yes. I knew about the present. And I saw her kiss you. And as far as that goes, you have done a swell job. Well, you've got to decide for yourself, Beverley, of course. But if you're asking my opinion, I think she really does want you to stay. And if you want to know how I feel about it, I hope you will too. I should think you and I ought to be able to face each other if we can face her. And there's something else maybe you haven't thought of. If Zoe hadn't been so sick she wouldn't need you so much now. And she wouldn't have been so sick if——"

"No. I didn't think about it that way. All right, Bob, I will stay. Through the summer anyhow. I'll write to Cincinnati to-night. If Zoe doesn't want me any longer when fall comes, and the job isn't open in Cincinnati then, I can always get one somewhere else."

That was what Bob and Beverley had said to each other, and they both knew that Zoe was aware, substantially, of what they had

said. Neither one did her the injustice of thinking for one moment that she wanted to prove her hold on Bob at Beverley's expense, or that she was testing them to see how they would act in the face of her own reunion with her husband. They knew that Zoe was neither small nor suspicious, and that she had told the whole truth when she said she wanted Beverley to stay and why. After that first encounter they did not talk to each other about anything except routine work before Bob went away again.

Congress did adjourn in the middle of June, and he sailed two days later. Zoe went up to New York to see him off, and they spent the night before he left at the Commodore, in a little suite like the one they had had for their honeymoon. They tried to talk about it lightly, at first with some success, but gradually they had grown more and more grave, just as they had when Bob came back to Pau from Germany.

"Shall we have tomato soup and minute steak and ice cream again, Zoe? Gosh, what a crude young savage you must have thought I was, ordering a dinner like that for our bridal feast! There you were, fresh from France, where every meal except those damned apologies for breakfast is a sort of poem, and I had no more imagination than to feed you tomato soup and minute steak and ice cream."

"It didn't matter. I didn't eat very much of it, anyway, as I remember. I was too preoccupied with the thought of that long white nightgown you wanted me to wear."

"I'm delighted to see that you still wear them."

"Yes, I've never lost the habit. I always have striven to please. But I didn't know then whether I could succeed or not. You were a crude young savage about lots of other things besides food."

"I'll say I was. And afterwards I was scared stiff. I thought I'd probably mutilated you for life or something. I'll never forget how I felt when you put your arms around my neck of your own accord and said, 'Now we belong to each other.'"

"How did you feel? You never gave me the satisfaction of telling me."

"Why, thankful and relieved and almost overwhelmed with surprise and joy."

"I don't see why you should've been surprised. What I said was true. It always has been. It always will be."

"I know it, darling. And it means more to me than anything else in the world."

She knew that he was also speaking the truth, and this knowledge kept her from vain regrets because this mutual possession had so long been incomplete, and from formless fears because another protracted separation now lay ahead of them, which might bring back the habit of disunity. But he guessed the thoughts that lay

at the back of her mind, and before morning he spoke to her about them in a way that gave her fresh confidence and fresh hope.

"Zoe, will you indulge me, as long as we're not going to have another chance to talk together for months and months, and let me say I'm sorry about something? You let me talk about anything else, but as soon as I start to say I'm sorry you shut me up."

"All right. I'll indulge you this time if it isn't about something that's happened when we've been apart. I'm not sure it's good for you to let you have your own way, but I will."

"It isn't about anything that happened while we were apart. It's just this: I always knew you wanted to have another baby. I always knew you didn't care what you went through as long as you had one. I'm sorry I wouldn't let you take the chance when you pleaded with me about it."

"If you're going to start talking about being sorry, you might let me say I'm sorry I didn't admit that I knew the reason. I knew you wanted to spare me, because you didn't understand how I felt."

"I will let you say it. But I haven't finished yet. What I'm getting at is this: you hated all those 'precautions' so—you fought against them so—and still I forced them on you. And now we've been living together normally for six months and nothing's happened. Probably you wouldn't have had a baby anyway in all that time I didn't want you to. I can't help being sorrier than ever that I complicated our lives so needlessly."

"You said it meant more to you than anything in the world to know we belonged to each other. It means more than anything else in the world to me, too. But, next to that, I can't think of anything that would mean as much as what you've just said. Because now I know we'll never separate again, in any way that matters. And sometime——"

She could not quite finish. She did not quite dare to say, "I know that sometime there will be another baby." I mustn't take too much for granted, she thought. I mustn't ask for too much. I've got Bob, I've got him for good, I ought to be satisfied with that; I will be. So all she said was: "And sometime we'll get so we won't be sorry about anything, either of us. Because we can make up for the times we have to be apart by loving each other all the harder when we are together."

"Like tonight."

"Yes, like tonight."

She was determined that she would not let him see her break down, that her farewell kiss should be like the ones she had given him during the night, valiant and passionate. But at the last moment, when they were in his stateroom, after the gong had rung, her words belied her unquivering lips and dry eyes.

"Bob, do you realize that this is the first time I've been the one

to stay behind and you've been the one to go, when the ocean would be between us?"

"I hadn't thought about it before. But it's so, at that. How do you like it?"

"I don't like it at all. I don't see how I'm going to stand it."

"If I really believed that of course I wouldn't go. But you can stand it, just as I always have. Promise me you won't work too hard, though, while I'm gone, darling."

"All right, I promise."

"And you can stand it, can't you? It isn't for long. Just for three or four months."

"Of course I can stand it. I wouldn't have you give it up for anything. But three or four months seems awfully long to me, just the same."

She had not liked it at all. It had seemed very long to her. There were many days and many nights when she did not see how she was going to stand it. But, in a certain measure, her loneliness was assuaged by the presence of Helen, who came up from Hunter's Green to see both Bob and Giles off, and who afterwards lingered along in the Alexandria house, apparently still undecided what she wanted to do next. Giles had been given command of the Yangtze Patrol, and had started west at the same time Bob had started east; he had done his best to persuade Helen to marry him before his departure, but, as Zoe had predicted, Helen had proved adamant. What possible point would there be, she demanded, to living in lonely splendour in Giles' Washington establishment, deprived not only of his society but of the society of all the other men now bent on making life agreeable to her, who would be kept away by either scruples or fright if she were married? On the other hand, she could not see herself settling down by herself in Shanghai, even if she could get permission to go there—the Navy Department was tightening up on wives all the time—and waiting around while Giles went steaming off among the cliffs and the cascades, not to mention the brigands and the Japs; surely she had had enough of unavoidable "revolts" in Mexico without voluntarily inviting disaster on the scene of a frightful war; the reports of bombings coming in from China were growing worse and worse every day. Zoe did not attempt to argue with her, and she did not try to force Helen's apparently reluctant confidence regarding her attitude towards her other suitors. She was glad enough to have her sister-in-law with her on any terms.

She was also glad that it was possible for her to spend most week-ends at Hunter's Green, swimming and riding in the leisurely way which was all her strength would permit, and playing with the twins, who had now reached the creeping stage, and to whom she became deeply devoted in spite of herself. Ronnie's financial

worries were all behind her now; she and Welby were showing at Saratoga that year and their success was unquestionable. With the stock farm doing so well the by-products of the orchard had been relegated to a secondary position, and though the revenue from them was increasingly substantial, Ronnie was arranging to have their management and marketing taken over by a small stock company. True to Zoe's other prediction, she was already expecting another child, which would be born when the twins were about a year and a half old. She wanted to have her hands free for her family, and Zoe, whom she consulted on the subject, was all in favour of the stock company.

The demands of the office, even more than the companionship of her sister-in-law and her friend, did much to absorb Zoe's time. Mary had been promoted to act as Beverley's assistant and a new girl, Gracie Reynolds, had been put at the switchboard. Gracie was not as prepossessing in the beginning as Mary. She chewed gum and stuck pencils behind her ears; she swore with a proficiency and a recklessness which caused Zoe to wonder why she herself had ever been considered profane in her youth; and she was much preoccupied with "uplift," which referred, unfortunately, to the scanty garment she wore under her gaudy blouse and not to journalism. But she was a little bear for work. No hours were too long for her and no task too hard; and she so quickly became Zoe's devoted slave that it was not hard to indicate certain reforms tactfully. A man, whose name was Emilio Rodriguez, had been added to the staff, too; his mother was an American, and his father, now dead, had been an Argentinian diplomat of some standing. He had only lately received his citizenship papers, and his affiliations with South America were still intimate and advantageous; he had served his journalistic apprenticeship on *La Prensa* in Buenos Aires and was a skilled and experienced newspaperman. Bert, while muttering that Emilio's ways were probably as slick as his hair, felt the same satisfaction as Zoe about having him in the bureau, which moved during the summer into still larger quarters in order to accommodate these recent additions.

The supervision of the newly enlarged office and the direction of its personnel took most of Zoe's time and all of her strength. But it did not quell her anxiety about Bob, which she had not been able to wholly suppress at any time since his departure, and which rose by leaps and bounds when he began to fly backwards and forwards between England and Germany in the wake of Chamberlain. She was sure, from day to day, that war would be declared, and that if it were he would stay to cover it. She herself went to cover the holocaustic hurricane in New England and two tornadoes in Charleston, so frantic with fear for Bob that her senses were dulled to the horrors which she saw herself; and when he finally came back, fulminating because Czecho-Slovakia had been "sold down the

river" by France and England, her thankfulness in having him home again drugged her into partial disregard of almost everything he described to her—the digging of bomb shelters in London, the posting of maps in Paris apartment houses showing the nearest communal cellars, the recall of all German ships, the gas mask rehearsals, the manning of the Maginot Line——

"And Chamberlain stands up and quotes poetry: 'Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.' *Safety!* Europe is about as safe right now as a lighted keg of dynamite."

"Perhaps it isn't as bad as you think. There have been some explosive situations on this hemisphere, too, but they seem to have quieted down now. That Nazi putsch in Chile, for instance."

"Yes, I want you to tell me more about that. Gosh, but I wish now we'd given those South American stories you wrote a heavier play. They were damn sound—and damn prophetic."

"It wouldn't have made any difference if you had, Bob. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. You can write news for people but you can't make them read it. Not until they're ready, not until they're in the mood. You know that swell story you wrote from Danzig last year——"

"Say, I'd forgotten about that. I have a good mind to send it in again next year, practically the same way I wrote it in the first place, and see what happens."

"But you won't be writing stories from Europe next year. I will."

"Over my dead body! What do you mean, you will?"

"That was the bargain, wasn't it? That we go on alternate years from now on? And that the one who didn't go to Europe would sit on the lid in Washington while the other one was gone?"

"Yes, but look here, Zoe, I'd have hæmorrhages worrying about you if you went to Europe next year!"

"Well, what do you think I've had all the time you've been in Europe this year?"

"I'm a man. I can look out for myself."

"I looked out for myself a long time, even if I am a woman, and no one worried about me either."

"Before you knew me, maybe. I've always worried about you since then. Perhaps you didn't know it, but I have."

His voice was disarmingly fond. Zoe, who had begun to feel annoyed, felt her anger melting away under the spell of it.

"Besides, darling, you don't look very strong to me even yet. I'm afraid you did work too hard while I was gone, after all."

"No, I didn't. But there has been a lot to do. And the hurricane took more out of me than I realized at the time. Those poor people—those bewildered animals—those beautiful trees—— It's tragic, Bob, what's happened in New England. And the reports from the Orient are appalling. Japan is simply taking over China piecemeal.

Helen hears from Giles, guarded letters of course, but it's easy enough to read between the lines, just the same."

"It's tragic and appalling, what's happening all over the world. But we mustn't let it get us down. Not as long as we have each other."

In October, Zoe's book, which had appeared several months earlier in England, came out in the United States, an American publisher having "discovered" her "delicate and subtle skill as a novelist, specially gifted in revealing the elusive, the mystic and the tragic," only when "Vagrant Cherry" had been appearing on best-seller lists and winning the unstinted praise of critics from one end of the British Empire to the other. She scored a second immediate success, which threw her followers who had thought of her solely as a journalist, and, until fairly recently, as a journalist who was apt to show herself vituperative or tough or both upon occasion, into a state of bewilderment from which she herself derived a certain amount of amusement. But she did not have much time to dwell upon her triumph, and none at all to start the second novel which she was instantly importuned from several sources to write at an amazing increase in advance royalties; for the next month she went, unexpectedly, to cover the Pan-American Conference in Buenos Aires, sailing on the same ship with the Secretary of State and numerous other officials, one of whom, Ambrose Estabrook, had definitely requested her to take the assignment "because of her unusual grasp of Latin-American affairs, her undeniable flair for interpreting them, and her excellent command of the Spanish language." Less officially, he suggested that Helen would also be a welcome addition to the important group which was going, and at the last moment she joined her sister-in-law, who had occasion, over and over again, to accuse her of diverting the attention of dignitaries from the troublesome matters which were weighing on their minds.

Zoe wrote her first story about the strike which held up the ship for six hours before it could leave New York harbour, and Bob gave both this, and the pieces she wrote afterwards, the "heavy play" they had not received before. He had put no impediment in the way of her going, and she herself succeeded in leaving without too much emotional upheaval. They had indeed learned to "love each other hard" when they were together, storing up reserves against those periods when they must be apart. Since this was so, as Zoe herself had said, there were no separations any more that "really mattered," at least, beyond the point of bearing, if they were indicated "along the line of duty."

When the Conference was over she flew across the Andes, and from Peru cabled suggesting a further prolongation of her absence: She thought she had better visit Central America briefly on her

way home, she said, and then go, also briefly, to Mexico, where Helen very naturally wanted to stop. Bob did not object to any of this either; but Zoe was right in suspecting that he might use his acquiescence in this instance as a pretext for trying to keep her from starting off again, soon after her return, for Europe. She was not annoyed with him, even mildly, a second time; but she was firm on the subject; a bargain was a bargain, and she meant to hold him to his now, exactly as he had often held her to hers. Unexpectedly, she found an ally in Helen, who came back to Alexandria, for Helen wanted to go to Europe herself that summer. It suddenly appeared that she had promised Lord and Lady Grenville, not to mention Guy, that she would make a long visit at Star Hundred. Guy's leave, during the last two years, had at no time been long enough for him to come to America. This was hardly surprising, considering the hectic state of affairs abroad, which—Helen told her brother blandly—he was always shouting about himself. Therefore it was only reasonable that she should go to England. She said this as if she expected her family to take a predilection on her part for Guy as a matter of course, though up to this moment she had never mentioned it, and she still continued to dispatch frequent letters to China. Furthermore, she went on, she wanted Zoe to go with her this time. She did not propose to ask Isabel again. Isabel, in any case, was going with the Lichtensteins to Long Island on their yacht, directly after the garden party at the British Embassy, to which the Lichtensteins were invited, though Isabel was not. But Zoe was free to go to Europe, or ought to be. Bob ought not to expect her to stay straight through the heat of Washington two summers in succession. She had never heard of such a thing. She had engaged a beautiful suite for Zoe and herself on a late June sailing of the *Ile de France*. Perhaps Bob had Zoe cowed because he acted like a bully. But Helen knew it was all a bluff. She knew that underneath he had a kind heart and she did not propose to let him deceive her——

Rocking gently to and fro in her swinging chair, Zoe smiled as she thought about Helen and the skill with which Bob had been wound around his sister's pretty little finger. No one except Helen could have managed him so skilfully, Zoe said to herself. Certainly she could not. She had never learned to be adroit, as far as Bob was concerned, and she knew that she never would. But she had learned how to keep close to him, without misunderstanding him or being misunderstood herself, without hurting or getting hurt. What did adroitness matter compared to the deep contentment and the happy companionship and the passionate love which, in spite of every handicap, she had won and kept?

As if in answer to her question, the door leading from the hallway to the garden swung open, and Bob came down the brick

walk. The sides of the seat hid her as he approached, and she sat up, so that he could see her, and gave a welcoming whistle. She saw the pleased expression that spread over his face as he caught sight of her, and when he sat down beside her he put both arms underneath her waist as he leaned over to kiss her.

"I always did like a garden better with a girl in it," he said, "not to mention a swing seat—I hope you're feeling as well as you look. I was a little bothered because Beverley said you left the office early."

"A purely precautionary measure. I knew the crowd that is coming tonight would not 'go home until morning, till daylight doth appear.' And Beverley had everything well in hand, as usual. Anything new on the Hill?"

"No. Except that the Chairman of Foreign Relations has finally got things fixed up with the British Embassy so that all the Ladies of the Senate—except the widows of senators and the wives of ex-members—can go to the Royal Garden Party. Incidentally, their husbands will accompany them. Reluctantly, I imagine, in most cases. They're pretty well fed-up with all this fuss. But there's going to be a reception at the Capitol too. You can come to that, if you like. And Helen. That is, you and she can sit outside in a roped off space, and watch the King and Queen come down the steps and walk along the aisle between the reserved seats on the east front. There's going to be some press privileges. And Father gets two or three tickets. Maybe more. I'm not sure yet."

"Bob, this is the greatest thrill of my life since you proposed to me. I only wish you'd telephoned to tell me. It would've saved me a very long argument with your mother. I told her I thought the Chairman of Foreign Relations would crash through with his charm. But I couldn't be sure. I bet even he had hard sledding."

"Show me your tongue, Zoe."

"I'll show it to you, but that's more than I'd do for your mother. She wanted me to write a spiteful piece."

"And you wouldn't?"

"No. But I told her someone else was sure to do it. So I really don't deserve too much credit."

He still had his arms around her, and she nestled a little nearer to him, and looked up at him with a smile which invited a still closer caress. For the first time since she could remember, he was apparently oblivious of her nearness. He looked away from her, almost unseeing, and spoke with the bitterness of deep and dreadful foreboding.

"You're right," he said. "Someone else will—and make a lot of money out of it too. It's a queer world, isn't it? Within the last three months Memel's 'surrendered' to Germany and Hitler's abrogated the Naval Treaty with Great Britain and the non-aggression pact with Poland. Italy's invaded Albania, Hungary's

invaded Ruthenia, and the King of Iraq's been killed in another of those mysterious automobile 'accidents' that seem to make it pretty unsafe for rulers to go out riding. The Civil War's ended in Spain, which may mean almost anything, and Cardinal Pacelli, who knows the minds of men, especially men in Italy and Germany, as well as he knows the back of his own hand, has been elected Pope. The French Chamber of Deputies has given Daladier dictatorial powers, Chamberlain's pledged support to France, and pledged both Britain and France to fight for Poland in case of aggression. Poland's refused Germany's demand for the return of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, and Britain's announced a new policy in Palestine, limiting Jewish immigration, and has sent Sir William Strang to negotiate a pact with Russia that will probably fail. One or two things have happened in the United States too. The President has set up three new co-ordinating agencies and has asked Congress to restore the one hundred and fifty billion cut from relief appropriations and Congressional investigators have approved the TVA. The Supreme Court has authorized a state income-tax on Federal salaries, reversing a sixty-eight years old precedent, and upheld the new AAA and outlawed sitdown strikes. But just the same, there's been a soft coal strike that has virtually halted production. The submarine *Squalus* has gone down with twenty-six poor young devils trapped in it, and enormous fairs have been opened in San Francisco and New York. And so what? So all anyone in Washington talks about, and anyone in the whole darn country seems to want to read about, is whether the right people have been invited to a garden party at the British Embassy or whether they haven't."

"Why, Bob? How on earth did you ever correlate all those facts like that? Where did you learn to talk about them like that? I never heard you get off such a speech before in my life."

"I never felt like this before in my life—— Come on. We've got to dress and I want you to go upstairs with me. I feel like shouting to you while you're in the shower. It may help me to let off steam. Just how many people is it that we have coming to dinner?"

CHAPTER XXXVI

ZOE found the last few weeks prior to her departure for Europe trying in many ways. As usual, her calendar was a little too full for comfort, and the unexpected demands made upon her time by two English journalists crowded it past the point which she could conveniently manage. One of the journalists was the representative of a large London daily, the other the representative of an important British magazine; both of them had been instructed to seek her out, and to get interviews with her, as the result of the widespread success of "Vagrant Cherry" through the British Empire; both had been baffled to find that the British Embassy in Washington had apparently never heard of her. They made connections with her, somewhat tardily, at the dinner which the Men's Press Club and the Women's National Press Club united to give in compliment to the British journalists who had been accompanying the Royal Party on the pilot train; and, after that, she and Bob gave a party for them at the Alexandria house, which they took particular pains to make as pleasant as possible. Zoe had been "at the other end of the pencil," as she put it, in too many interviews to fail in lending a helping hand to someone else who was trying to get one; and she really liked both the rather shy young girl and the rather blasé elderly man on whose "must" list her name appeared. But she was sincere in saying that personal publicity appealed to her less and less as time went on, and she was so chronically tired in those days, that the strain of any extra entertaining wearied her out of all measure to its importance.

A far more serious complication came from an unexpected encounter with Isabel. Zoe had seen comparatively little of the social secretary for a long while, largely because she herself had been either ill or away so much of the time since Isabel had been with the Lichtensteins. Now they were suddenly thrown together a good deal. The Lichtensteins entertained lavishly and delightfully on their new yacht the *Miranda*. Albert Lichtenstein was bluff, witty and genial; his wife, Betty, who was considerably his junior, was a beauty, with a sweet, sunny disposition on which neither money nor flattery had produced the slightest deleterious effect. Their attitude towards their late landlords was extremely hospitable, and Bob and Zoe reciprocated this feeling of cordiality. The slight stiffness that existed between them and Isabel had always seemed to trouble her far more than it did them; they saw no reason why her connection with the Lichtensteins, to whom, as they were well aware, she had succeeded in making herself extremely valuable, should interfere with the frequency of their visits

to the yacht, and the carefree spirit of good fellowship which pervaded these. But one evening when the Mortons arrived rather early for cocktails, before a dinner elsewhere to which they and the Lichtensteins were all going on a little later, Betty was still dressing, Albert invited Bob to see the crew's quarters, and Zoe was left alone with Isabel.

It did not occur to her that this was the sort of moment for which Isabel had long been lying in wait. The river was quiet, the air soft, and the sunset lambent rather than gorgeous. Zoe was glad that there was no crowd on the yacht for cocktails, that she and Bob had been invited by themselves; she found large, noisy gatherings increasingly taxing. Stretched out at ease on a big deck-chair, she was prepared to find even the company of Isabel agreeable and relaxing. She smoked her cigarette and sipped her cocktail, making a few inconsequential observations about the pleasantness of the surroundings, but not trying to talk much. Isabel's own approach to conversation struck her without warning, like a broadside.

"I hear a rumour you're going to Europe again very soon, Mrs. Morton. Surely that isn't true?"

"Yes, I'll be off in about a fortnight now. My sister-in-law and I are sailing together. We are going to visit first at the Grenvilles' place, Star Hundred. I believe you and Helen went there together once."

"Oh, I've been there a number of times! I've known the Grenvilles all my life. Does that mean dear little Helen has decided to reward Guy's long devotion at last? He's been remarkably patient, hasn't he? But it's possible to try any man's patience too far. As women of the world, you and I both know that."

"Helen hasn't confided in me at all, Mrs. Windsor. You know as much about her plans as I do—if she has any, which I rather doubt. I think she's having a good time drifting."

"But you do agree with me about trying a man's patience, don't you?"

"I hadn't thought very much about it, I'm afraid."

"Well, I was afraid myself that you didn't at one time. In fact, all your friends were a good deal troubled for fear you might have a very bitter blow. But everything worked out well in the end, didn't it? And I think you were so sensible about it all. Of course, people don't look at divorce and remarriage the way they used to. But, still—a Senator's son and a girl in his own office! That is the sort of thing that does still get spread all over the pages of the yellow press, isn't it? Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't mean to speak disrespectfully of the Fourth Estate. I am sure you didn't misunderstand me."

"I don't understand anything you've said to me, Mrs. Windsor."

"Why, you can't mean it! I wouldn't have said a word, for the

world, if I had dreamed that could be so! I've always heard that the wife is the last to know in such cases. But you're so quick to see everything at a glance that I supposed, of course, you would be the exception proving the rule. We all did. And everyone supposed you smoothed things over, in the most skilful possible way, by keeping the girl on and not interfering, as long as your husband didn't insist on marrying her. Of course, we could understand that marriage would have been a very public affront to your pride. But you were gone so much, it was natural, wasn't it, that he should grow dependent on her society, and begin to take her out quietly at first and then more and more publicly? You must excuse me for being so maladroit. I thought the whole thing had become quite the kindly, conventional *ménage à trois*. Nevertheless, if you will forgive me for saying so, now that we have stumbled on the subject, I should think you'd be the least little bit afraid that if you went to Europe, so soon after your South American trip everything might become more conspicuous again, and cause renewed comment, just when all the horrid gossip had begun to die down."

There was a rustle of silk at the rear of the quarterdeck. Betty Lichtenstein, exquisitely dressed in cool, creamy colours, was coming towards them,

"Oh, dear Mrs. Lichtenstein! I was beginning to be afraid Donovan might not have had everything ready for you when you went down to dress! I've always thought she was a perfect maid, but then there's no such thing as *absolute* perfection, is there? Mrs. Morton and I have been sitting here in the sunset, telling each other amusing stories. It's been delightful, hasn't it, Mrs. Morton? But now I must be a really stern secretary, and send you straight along to your dinner, without letting you linger over any cocktails at all. Because the Secretary of the Navy is such a *martinet* when it comes to promptness, and he will insist on dining at eight instead of eight-thirty like everyone else nowadays."

Zoe was determined not to let it worry her, and still it did worry her. The first aspect of her concern was wholly unselfish; she was more troubled about Beverley than about herself. She had supposed that the affair had been safeguarded by secrecy, and now, for the first time, she realized that it had not. Somewhere along the line there had been carelessness about appearances, disregard of consequences; if Isabel knew, so did others, as Isabel herself had intimated. How few, or how many, was beyond the point. If anyone knew, Beverley would eventually suffer. And Beverley had always run so straight, except for this one slip; she was so forthright, so reliable, so capable, so promising. It was ghastly to think that her security and her future and her peace of mind could be insidiously weakened by Isabel and her like.

Being human, the second aspect of Zoe's concern centred on herself. She would have been willing to swear that if any man had ever loved a woman, steadfastly and sincerely and passionately, that was the way Bob loved her. The affair with Beverley had been only an interlude, based on normal needs which she herself had temporarily failed to fulfil for him, but lacking in any other significance. It had none of the meaning of marriage; it was without the very elements of permanence. She had never doubted that her husband spoke the truth when he told her that her rapt exclamation, "Now we belong to each other!" meant more to him than anything else in the world, both when she first voiced it, and when she had repeated it, years later, with still deeper, still more poignant feeling. Everything he had ever said and done in their every relationship, confirmed her faith in his basic fidelity and his unswerving devotion. Jealous, unreasonable, even abusive as he had been at times, she was sure that these qualities were only phases of a strong sense of possessiveness. Every being had the faults of his virtues as well as the virtues of his faults; he would not be human otherwise; and she was fortunate in having married a man whose failings were those of virility and not of weakness. She had believed this from the beginning, and she believed it now. Yet, questioning thrusts, like little dagger-points, began to pierce her consciousness. Had Bob pursued her because he could not live without her, or merely because, being essentially just, he could not be at peace with himself until he had admitted the injustice he had done her? Had he stayed with her because he adored her or because he pitied her? If she had not taken the initiative, in begging him to come back to her, would his own desire have driven him to claiming her, wordlessly and forcibly, as it had so many times in the past? Was a woman ever justified in asking for a man's love, openly and artlessly, as she had asked for his? Could she possibly have mistaken the character of his constancy ever since their reunion? She knew that these questions were unworthy of her and insulting to her husband, and still they continued to disquiet her. She finally felt that they could be laid at rest only if she knew, beyond every shadow of doubt, that marriage had never been mentioned between Bob and Beverley, that they themselves had consistently regarded their relationship as essentially ephemeral and essentially illicit.

She was sure that a single question to Bob would set her mind at rest. Of course, if she asked him, he would tell her not to be silly, of course he would say that he had never thought of anyone but her as his wife. And yet how could she ask him this question? She had never mentioned Beverley's name to him in connection with his avowed faithlessness; she was still determined that she never would. Probably she would have kept to her resolve, in spite of the way in which the matter had begun to prey upon her mind, if Bob

himself had not noticed that there was something amiss and started in to question her.

"Zoe, you haven't acted like yourself since the last time we had cocktails on the *Miranda*. What did that Windsor hellion do to you while Al and I were going over the yacht?"

"She didn't do anything to me. What do you think she did? Try to throw me overboard?"

"I wouldn't put it past her. What did you talk about?"

"I didn't talk much. I looked at the sunset."

"To hell with the sunset. What did *she* talk about?"

"Cabbages and kings."

"You might as well tell me, Zoe. Because I'm not going to give you any peace until you do."

She did not tell him then, or the next time he asked her. But he declined to let the subject drop. At last, harried to desperation by his insistence, she asked him the one question which she still thought would settle everything.

"Bob, did you ever ask anyone but me to marry you?"

He laughed, exactly as she had foreseen, and also as she had foreseen, told her not to be silly. They were staying late in the walled garden, because it was a very hot night, and they were cooler there than they would have been upstairs; but the place had the same privacy and the same quiet as their own bedroom. The stars were mild and friendly, and there was a fitful breeze which blew the fragrance of their flowers to them in wafts. Zoe was lying in the swing seat, wearing only the soft, filmy white that Bob loved, and he was sitting in a big chair beside her. If ever a moment could be propitious, this one was. So she persisted.

"But did you?"

"I don't remember. I suppose I must have. Boys do that sort of thing every now and then, while they're having their growing pains, just the way they start slicking back their hair and put on long trousers and find out what it feels like to get tight."

"I didn't mean that sort of a kid proposal. I meant after you were grown up. After you came to Washington."

"Now let me see. Did I put my trifling with Ronnie's young affections into concrete words? No, I really believe my conscience is quite clear on that score."

"I don't mean Ronnie and I don't mean that period."

"Well, suppose you tell me what you do mean. I must be pretty dumb or something, but I can't seem to catch on."

"I can't seem to tell you because it's connected with something I've sworn I'd never talk about. But I'll try again. Have you ever asked anyone to marry you since you and I've been married?"

"Maybe it would be your idea of fun to be arraigned for bigamy, Zoe, but it wouldn't be mine."

"Then you haven't?"

"How many different ways and how many different times do you want me to tell you?"

"No more ways and no more times. Thanks a lot, Bob, for putting up with so much foolishness. I guess I'm even more tired than I thought I was. But a sea trip will set me up again. It always does."

She lifted her arms and pulled his face down to hers. She was much more spontaneous in showing her love than she had been as a girl, and now he felt that her whole being was encompassed by her kiss. When he raised his head and looked at her in the soft starlight, he could see that the strained expression, which had worried him so much during the last days, was gone. She gazed at him with glad eyes.

"You've made me so happy, Bob, that I don't mind any more telling you what was troubling me. Isabel did upset me. She was telling malicious lies about you and—well, a friend of mine of whom I'm very fond. She said you'd been seen everywhere together, that everyone knew about this affair. That the talk around town was, I had bought you off by agreeing to countenance it if you didn't insist upon a divorce. That I'd saved my pride by letting you live with another woman while I stayed in your house and kept your name. I don't know why I didn't throw *her* overboard! Of course I know—what really did happen, Bob. But I know there was never any scandal about it. I know it was all over long ago. And I know there wasn't any question of marriage connected with it. I just wanted to hear you say so, that's all."

She put her arms up again. Bob took hold of them and held them with his hands, firmly, for a moment. Then he drew them down, and still holding them, looked her squarely in the face.

"Zoe, I tried to talk to you about this in Lourdes, and you wouldn't let me. I knew some time it was bound to rise up and hit us if I didn't. I knew the kind of happiness we've had couldn't last. It was simply too good to be true."

"But, you just said——"

"I didn't mean to lie to you. I honestly thought you were just joking. But I can't lie to you now that I understand, either. We—Beverley and I—did go around a lot together. To dinner at little restaurants and to the Watergate Concerts and the Crossroads Theatre and places like that. Out with the same crowd at private parties, too. I suppose there was some talk about us. I don't know how much, but there must have been some. Not enough to create what you'd call a scandal. Of course I tried to be careful. I wasn't quite such a fool that I didn't do that, for your sake and—hers, too. But I suppose I must have been seen going to her apartment. And leaving it. Of course she has a walk-up, in a small house, the sort of place where the person living above you or below you or beside you could die, and you'd never know it. Once in a while, though,

you do meet someone on the stairs or in the entrance. But nearly everyone who knew or guessed what was happening, must have stopped talking about it long ago, except one or two foul-mouthed gossips like Isabel Windsor. They've probably forgotten about it, as far as that goes. Too many new scandals, a good deal more sensational than that one, that they can really lick their chops over, are coming along all the time. And there's been nothing to keep this one alive. I've never even talked to Beverley alone but once since you and I came home from Europe. That was the first day at the office when you asked her to stay and told her to talk things over with someone before she decided to leave. She figured by 'someone' you meant me, so she waited for me."

"Yes, of course I meant you. I expected her to talk to you."

"Well, she lit into me then for not keeping my promise. Because I had promised her, before I followed you to Europe, that I'd tell you everything. And I did try. You know I tried."

"Yes, I know you tried. But I thought it would be easier for all of us, Bob, if Beverley's name were never actually mentioned, and I knew there'd never been any question of a divorce."

She still spoke calmly. But something in his silence suddenly disquieted her. She asked another question.

"There wasn't, was there?"

He still did not speak. She sat up, swinging her feet over the side of the seat and clutching at the hands that had continued to hold hers.

"Bob, why don't you answer me?"

"Because it's so hard. I'm trying to think how to say it, how to make you understand. I did think you'd divorce me. I didn't think you'd try to drag Beverley down. I didn't think you'd be vicious and vengeful, the way I'd been. But I thought you'd stay away until after Giles had come up for selection to save him, and then I thought you'd come back and divorce me for cruel and abusive treatment. I thought you wouldn't be any less than human if you did that."

"But, Bob, the thought of divorcing you never entered my head! I've told you—I've always felt we belonged to each other whatever happened. I couldn't have divorced you no matter what you'd done. It would have killed me to lose you."

"Yes, I know that now. But I didn't realize it, fully, then. I've told you I was a damn fool, on top of everything else."

"But you never told anyone else you thought I might divorce you, did you, Bob? You never said so to Beverley?"

"Yes, Zoe, I did. You know I'd rather be drawn and quartered than tell you this. But that's exactly what I did."

"In connection with marrying her?"

"Yes, in connection with marrying her. She was taking terrible chances, and I thought I ought to safeguard her in some way. She

wouldn't even let me give her a raise, or provide her with a decent apartment. So I told her I'd be very glad to marry her, if she were willing, after you'd divorced me."

"You told her you'd be very *glad* to marry her!"

"Yes. At least, that's what I think I said. I couldn't somehow bring myself to ask her outright if she would. I couldn't actually propose to her as I would have to a girl I'd loved the way I've always loved you. Because, of course, I didn't want you to divorce me. But I was sure you'd never look at me again. And I'm afraid Beverley got to care for me while——"

"Of course she got to care for you. How could she help it?"

Zoe spoke as if any woman, knowing him, would inevitably come to love him. But while she said it, she drew away her hand and looked at him with misery in her eyes.

"And all this time that I've been happy with you, selfishly, she's been eating her heart out for you. If I had died in Lourdes, then you would have married her, then she could have been happy."

"Zoe, please don't say such a terrible thing. You know that if you had died in Lourdes, I'd have lost everything that made life worth living."

"But you would have married Beverley. Wouldn't you? *Wouldn't you?*"

"Zoe, I don't see how I could have. I don't see how I could have married anyone. If you'd divorced me, that would have been different. I'd have felt, perhaps, I owed it to her, as I've tried to explain. But if you'd died, I wouldn't have thought whether I owed her anything or not. I wouldn't have thought of anything except that I'd lost you."

"Not at first. But after awhile you would have. Look at Helen! She certainly loved Alfredo. She mourned him sincerely when he was killed. She grieved deeply for a little while. But now——"

"That was different, too. That was high romance, a sort of fairy tale love affair. What we've had has been something bigger than a romance, Zoe, or a fairy tale. We've saved and slaved to get where we are. We know what it was to do without, and to fight through poverty to a competence. We've known what it was like to work until we were ready to drop, and still go on working. We've had a child and lost it. We've quarrelled and made up and separated and come together again. You've been dangerously ill and you're not well yet. We've been through hard times as well as happy times together. We've shared more than Helen and Alfredo ever did and suffered more. Our marriage means more to us than theirs did to them, no matter how glamorously theirs began or how tragically it ended."

It was he who waited for an answer now and received none. He went on urgently.

"There's something else. Helen was still very young when

Alfredo died. It's easier to recover from a blow or a loss when you're young than when you get older. We're not children any more. We couldn't do that. We're a mature man and woman, still deeply in love with one another after years and years of marriage. That's rare. That's superb. That's invincible. And it's final, too."

He waited for her assurance that what he said was so. Still she did not answer.

"Isn't it, Zoe?" he asked desperately.

"I don't know. I thought so, but now I'm not sure. I don't see how we can go on being happy together when Beverley——"

"But Beverley doesn't care about me any more. She's all over it."

"How can you tell? You thought I didn't care about you any more."

She turned away from him with a little helpless gesture, which seemed to indicate that there was no security of any kind left in the world, and rose from the seat. Her white draperies fluttered in the fitful little breeze and the soft starlight cast an eerie light on her.

"I wish I had died in Lourdes," she said tonelessly. "That would have settled everything. I wouldn't have minded dying. I wanted to die—until you came. You would have been broken-hearted, I know that, Bob. You don't need to explain or protest. And your grief would have lasted longer than Helen's because our marriage has been different from hers in just the way you say. But, by and by, your grief would have passed. You'd have wanted to marry again. Any normal man would, just as any normal man would have wanted what you got from Beverley before. And you would have married Beverley, not only because it would have been right to do that and because you would have made her happy, but because she would have made you happy, too. She's very sweet and very unselfish. She hasn't any of my bad qualities and she has all my good ones. If I have any good ones. I'm not sure that I have."

"Darling, you're talking morbidly now. You wouldn't talk this way if you were well. You're completely exhausted. After you get out of this hideous heat and stop trying to follow a royal progress that you're not allowed to see, you'll be better. The ocean will do wonders for you, just as it always does. You'll be all right in a few days, just as you said yourself. Then you'll look at everything differently."

"I doubt it," she said still tonelessly. "I'll get rested and I'll feel better for a little while, and then I'll start overworking again and get exhausted again and be morbid, as you call it. What does all I've ever done or tried to do amount to? I fought and bit my way out of obscurity and poverty, and all the time I was doing that, the people who'd done it first tried to keep me from making any headway because they didn't want intruders or rivals in an overcrowded field. They knew from bitter experience how hard it was

to stay there even after you once got there. Well, I stayed there in spite of them, and now I've outstripped most of them. I've reached the top rank in journalism. I've made the best seller list on two hemispheres. And what am I getting out of it? The people who couldn't hold me back are jealous of me now, but they don't know how little reason there is why they should be. I'm tired all the time and sick half the time. A woman whom I've never tried to hurt has taken all the happiness I had, twice, and torn it into little pieces to get even with me for something that wasn't my fault. And I haven't had the strength or the sense or whatever it takes that I haven't, to hold my own husband!"

"You can't really be as unhappy as you sound, Zoe, or as sure that you'll never be happy again. If I hadn't heard you saying what you've just said, I wouldn't have believed you'd do it. Now if I'd heard Ronnie giving way to despair a few years ago, I shouldn't have been surprised. I'd have thought she had every reason to. It didn't look as if she did have much to live for. But you do have a good deal—the beautiful surroundings you were determined to achieve, and quite a little fame and the foundations of a fortune, and beauty and brains, and the affection and respect of some of the finest people in the world, and a husband who thinks the sun rises and sets on your head, even if he hasn't had the sense and the strength, as you put it, to be worthy of you."

"Ronnie!" Zoe exclaimed vehemently. "Ronnie is a better bluffer than I am. Not that I think for a moment she doesn't remember, every day of her life, with a pretty sharp pang, how Bennie was conceived and how Welby was crippled. But she bluffed so long and so hard that she's ended by believing most of the pretence herself. I can't kid myself that way. I've got more brains than Ronnie, even if she's got a better body. She's built as a woman ought to be, sound and strong and simple. She's satisfied with elemental things. I wasn't. Ronnie never wanted to be famous. She never wanted excitement and adventure and admiration. She didn't ask too much out of life, and she was willing to pay high for what she did have. I wasn't. To be wholly fair, I ought to add that I thought it was enough to have faith in myself, and Ronnie's known for a long time that you have to have faith in something else too. Providence, or any other name you give it. I learned a lesson at Lourdes I'll never forget. But I didn't learn it soon enough or well enough."

Gradually, while she talked to him, Bob began to visualize the extent of her discouragement, to fathom the depth of her despair; and with this comprehension came the bitter knowledge that nothing he could say or do at the moment would make any difference. But still he tried to speak cheerfully and consolingly.

"Zoe, we've gone over some pretty rough road already and come through all right. Can't you put your shoulder to the wheel with

me just once more? I think we'll reach the end of the hard going the next time."

"I never used to be afraid of a rough road. You ought to know that. But I seem to be losing my powers of endurance. And I can't bear the thought of accepting my happiness at the expense of another woman's."

"We'll try to do everything we can for her. We can try together now that we've faced this squarely at last. But please don't think just of your happiness and of Beverley's, Zoe. Think of mine, too, a little, won't you? Because that ought to count with you, too, if you care as much as you say you do. Even if I don't deserve it. Of course I know I don't. But there isn't any happiness in the world for me apart from you. And if you penalize me for telling you the truth, when you wrung it out of me, you may make me wish all the rest of my life that I'd lied to you instead."

He said the same thing to her again, before she sailed, and she tried desperately not to let him feel that he was being "penalized" for telling her the truth, to show him that she did not want to punish him, or even to reproach him for anything that had happened. She reiterated that she knew that she was basically to blame, both for his infidelity and for Beverley's sacrifice; and she told him, because she knew it was what he most yearned to hear, that her feeling of despondency and hopelessness had passed, that what Isabel had said would never make any difference to her, and that when she came home everything would be as it had been before the disastrous disclosures. But he knew it would not. He knew that the shadow cast by his sin, which he had seen for so long, was now visible to her too, and that its gloom was enveloping them both.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE *Ile de France* was not "sold out to the last berth," as glowing reports, issued by the French Line in conformity with all other steamship companies at the time, indicated to hesitant travellers who were undecided whether they should "risk" Europe that summer or not. But it gave the impression of being pleasantly filled, without being overcrowded, and both Helen and Zoe found numerous congenial spirits aboard, though Helen was far more disposed to take advantage of these than her sister-in-law. Left to herself, Zoe would have spent her mornings in bed, and her afternoons on the sofa of their little salon. But Helen propelled her outside, made her rest in her deck chair instead of in her stateroom, and dragged her around for a walk twice a day. She also supervised Zoe's meals and spoke to her with a severity totally uncharacteristic.

"Of course the French make the best bouillon in the world, just as they make the worst coffee, except the English. But you won't gain fifteen pounds on bouillon."

"I never said anything about gaining fifteen pounds."

"Bob did. He said if I didn't bring you back weighing fifteen pounds more than when you left, he'd shake me until my teeth chattered. He used to shake me when I was a little girl, before Mother had a chance to spank me for being naughty. I'm not sure that the shaking wasn't just as bad as the spanking would have been. You can't imagine how Bob hurts when he shakes."

Zoe did not make the indicated jocular retort, and Helen was very sorry she had spoken as she did, for immediately afterwards she remembered Bob's confession to her, the day she had gone to his office. But she went on speaking severely just the same.

"You're terribly thin, and I don't like the sound of your cough at all."

"I'm sorry it disturbed you. We must keep the doors closed between our rooms."

"I didn't mean that. I can sleep through anything. I meant it sounds to me like a bad cough."

"It isn't. There's just a little irritation along the windpipe. At least that's what some doctors say. Some others say it's caused by smoking too much, and two or three more say it's nothing but nervousness."

"Good heaven, Zoe, how many doctors have you seen?"

"I don't know. I lost track, long ago. But a good many. Just to please Bob. He worried, for a while, about my cough. I told him,

all the time, it was a silly little cough, and I think now he's got used to it."

"He hasn't any such thing. He's terribly worried about you, Zoe. And he says this is the last time he'll ever let you out of his sight, bargain or no bargain. He says next year either you and he will come to Europe together, or you'll both stay at home."

"Well, I have a feeling we may both stay at home. And not just because I'm coughing a little either."

"You don't really think there's going to be a war, do you?"

"I can think of lots of things that would surprise me a good deal more. But I hope it won't begin until I see you safely married to somebody."

"Is anyone ever 'safely' married, Zoe?"

"No, I suppose not. That is, I've never seen any safe marriages. So suppose I just say 'until I see you married.'"

"Would you let me get married in your house? You know I didn't have a real wedding before. So I'd like to this time."

"Why, yes, of course. I've often thought that house would be beautiful for a wedding."

"Yes, wouldn't it? I'd like to come down that exquisite stairway of yours, with its long landing, slowly, to soft music—the harp and the violin, for instance—on Father's arm. We could have the ceremony at the rear of the hall, and the guests could see from both sides, the drawing-room and the library both. Of course, we'd invite in more guests for the reception afterwards. But we'd keep it small—not more than five or six hundred. You would be my only attendant, which would be appropriate, because I was yours, and I'd like to have you wear jade green, because there's no colour half so becoming to you. But if you did that, then I couldn't wear blue, and blue is *my* colour. So I think perhaps——"

"I had no idea your plans were so definite. Why don't you wear shell pink? It's quite as becoming to you as blue, and it would be much better if you really want me in green."

"Why, I hadn't thought of shell pink! That would be lovely, wouldn't it? Shell pink satin, with my pearls, and green brocade for you. Probably Ronnie would lend you her emeralds. Now I think of it, I'd like to have Ronnie for an attendant, too, at least if she has the figure for it at the time; so that would cut out the emeralds, unless we could find something for you to wear that would correspond to her necklace. And we ought to have *quantities* of candlelight. We should have the wedding in the evening, because the house is even more charming by candlelight than it is in the daytime. And there must be a recipe for wedding cake that we can say has been in the family for six generations. We don't need to specify whose family, and the Hunters must have something of the sort. We don't worry about a recipe for punch, because

we'll have the champagne straight, passed around on silver trays, indefinitely, and——"

"The only point that isn't quite clear to me at this stage is the identity of the groom. You've neglected to mention that in passing."

"No, I haven't neglected it. I haven't decided it."

Helen gazed pensively at Zoe, who had sunk down on the sofa, but who was looking at her sister-in-law with the first gleam of merriment in her eye that Helen had seen since their departure. As the day was stormy Helen had consented to remain in their small salon for once, and now she put her arms down on the little centre table, and leaned her rosy face on them.

"I think I can tell you better after we've been to Star Hundred," she said. "I'd like to refresh certain memories I have in connection with it and Guy. I've always liked him very much, but, of course, when I went there the first time, I was head-over-heels in love with Alfredo, and nothing Guy said or did made any real impression. I'd like to see whether it would be different now. That's my main reason for going there. I rather expect it will be. But if it isn't, then——"

"Then you always have Giles and Dabney and Ambrose Estabrook and a few others to fall back on."

"Well, Giles——" Helen said, still pensively. "I'm very fond of Giles. And I've always thought I would like a beau with a boat. There's something quite intriguing about the navy, especially in the upper brackets, when officers get to commanding ships and having handsome quarters, and any number of orderlies, and 'ruffles' and boxes to football games, and precedence at parties. But after all Giles is fifty-four, and I'm not quite thirty. That means when I'm fifty-four he'll be seventy. And when I'm seventy he'll be either dead or senile, and I'd be a widow again, or worse. I'd prefer a little more life expectancy."

"That doesn't sound unreasonable to me."

"Besides," Helen went on, "Giles has been a very *adequate* suitor, if you know what I mean. But since we're talking candidly, Zoe, I might as well confess he's never given me a single thrill. I don't expect a succession of electric shocks, I don't want them. But I do want a certain amount of warmth. I can't help feeling the reason why Giles leaves me so unmoved is because he isn't very much moved himself. He loved Isabel, when he was young and thwarted, and he loved you, when he was mature and disillusioned, and now he's more or less burnt out. He'd like to get married, on general principles, and I think he's fond of me, in a fatherly sort of way, but it's a way that appeals to me less and less all the time. You do something queer to the men who fall in love with you, Zoe. They won't have anything left over for anyone else. Of course, I expect that by the time a man's fifty he'll have had a certain

number of love affairs, and I don't mind at all that he's had them with someone I know. But I wish Giles' hadn't been so devastating."

Helen looked at Zoe expectantly, as if waiting for some counter comment, but as Zoe made none, Helen went on with her thoughtful analysis of her suitors.

"Dabney stirred me up more, the very first time he kissed me, than Giles ever has throughout a fairly long courtship," she remarked. "You see Dabney had devoted himself to Ronnie for years and years, so unselfishly and objectively, that he had a lot of unused energy stored up to put into kissing. Not that he ever got out of bounds—you'd realize that, knowing Dabney. But he isn't like Giles, burnt out. Giles doesn't grab a hold of you and hug you till you can't breathe. He lifts your fingers to his lips. At least that's what he does with me. I know it isn't what he did with Isabel, and I don't suppose it's what he did, or tried to do, with you. But it's his idea of lovemaking now. Of course, the presents he sends you are simply superb, and he gives you a sense of tremendous importance. But I've had lots of presents already, and I'd rather be excited than revered."

"Well, that doesn't sound unreasonable to me either. So if Dabney——"

"But kisses aren't everything either, are they, Zoe? I've given them quite a fair trial to see. And I've discovered that aside from the fact that we do like to kiss each other, Dabney and I haven't much in common. We haven't a great deal to say to each other after we get through planning parties. And life in the country could be awfully dull, couldn't it, if you didn't count on talking to your husband?"

"I believe it was Byron, or some other accomplished authority, wasn't it, who wrote to a friend, soon after his marriage to an impeccable but insipid wife, saying: 'Of course, matrimony is a holy estate, but what do you do with your evenings?'"

"I don't know whether Byron said it or not, but I'm sure that's the way I'd feel, whenever we hadn't gone to a party, or to bed right after dinner, if I were married to Dabney. You know I'm not really a doggy girl, or a horsey one, Zoe. That is, the way girls get horsey and doggy in the Hunt Country, so that they're not much of anything else, except sexy, of course. I like to talk about plays and concerts and books and travel and politics, about I've been to the plays and the concerts, and read the books, and done the travelling, and mixed up in the politics. I don't want to stay on the same old estate year after year, no matter how beautiful it is, and just sit around after the hunting season is over and before the horse shows begin, saying, 'Now, let me see. Refinement was out of Abdication by Prince of Wales, wasn't she?' I think 'out of' is a horrid expression, anyway. I always flinch when I see it in the social columns, where you'd expect the language might be a little

more delicate, even if it is about the smart set in the Hunt Country and their doings."

Zoe interrupted her sister-in-law with the heartiest laugh Helen could remember hearing from this source in a long time. When it had died down to a more characteristic chuckle, Zoe managed to make another amused comment.

"The entries are being scratched fast, if I may use a sporting term without fear of being offensive. What about our friend in the State Department?"

"He's never actually asked me. He seems to be perpetually on the verge of a declaration, but he doesn't make it."

"The result of long, intensive training. A journalist should tell all, Helen, or nearly all, and a diplomat should tell nothing, or next to nothing. Haven't you found that out yet? I'm sure Ambrose Estabrook has the most honourable intentions in the world. But if he should announce in so many words that he'd like to marry you, he'd be overwhelmed with fear that it might bring on an international crisis."

"Perhaps that's the trouble. Or perhaps he really hasn't anything to say. I saw a reference to one or the other Assistant Secretaries of State in that 'Believe It Or Not' cartoon which said it took him just five minutes to dress from the skin out, with the help of his faithful valet. I don't believe it. I don't believe he has any skin. I think he came completely clothed, by Saville Row. I think Ambrose Estabrook did too."

Again Zoe burst out laughing. Helen could see a sparkle in her eyes and a little colour in her cheeks.

"Can't we put the blue ribbon on Guy, Helen, and be done with it?"

"No, not just like that. But we won't scratch the entry, and I don't mind that phrase, by the way. Come on, the rain's stopped. We've got to get up on deck for a while. I've promised two fans of yours, who are simply dying to meet you, that I'd have you on exhibition by tea-time. It's hard for me to live up to travelling with a celebrity, Zoe, especially a celebrity who is bound to stay in hiding, the way you are. You ought to be more co-operative. By the way, did I tell you? The *Commandant* sent me a note by a very trick-looking junior officer saying he wants us to come to his quarters for cocktails."

Guy met the *Ile de France* when it weighed anchor in Plymouth harbour at five in the morning, his own attire, though duly seasoned by the rain and wind of Star Hundred, suggestive of Saville Row, in spite of the ungodly hour. Indeed, one of the first questions Helen asked him was whether he were not wearing the same tweeds he had lived in during her maiden visit to his ancestral estate, and Guy, looking down at them with a laugh, admitted that they were.

"You won't find anything much changed there. We're a stable lot. Emily's put on about two stone, but she's still an excellent maid, and looking forward no end to serving you. We still have kidney stew and kippered herring for breakfast, in the same covered dishes that you admired before. I've run through the poetry section in the library to make sure we'd have plenty of reading material, and your old favourites look just as they always did; a little mustier and mellowed, that's all. I've added a few new volumes, Housman and Noyes, and so on, to the supply we had before, but I fully expect you'll turn back to Byron—— You'd think Helen would like Tennyson better, wouldn't you, Zoe? But she doesn't, she prefers Byron—— I've had the roofs of the pavilions in the park tested, too, Helen. They're all absolutely rainproof. You can take shelter in them any time you choose. And I guarantee you won't be lonely."

Helen blushed becomingly and smiled archly, without answering, and Guy, conscious that Zoe had been only superficially included in his first remarks, turned back to her.

"I hope you'll enjoy what we have to offer, Zoe. But I expect we shan't be able to keep you for long. Christopher Semple is coming down for the week-end; though, so you won't have the excuse that you have to rush off to London to see him. What are your plans after you leave England?"

"Rather indefinite still. Bob extracted a silly promise from me that I wouldn't go to Germany this year. Some of the later articles we both wrote about it are blacklisted, according to rumour, and though I think I could get in all right, he says there have been some queer 'accidents' to journalists who weren't over and above welcome."

"He's right, of course—— Are you going to have a look at Franco's Spain?"

"Yes, I thought I'd buy a car in France and work my way south. We didn't bring one with us because of coming here. Then I might sell it and go home by Clipper. I'd have come over on the first flight if Helen hadn't preferred to make directly for Star Hundred. But I'd like to see Lisbon again. Bob and I were both fascinated by it when we stopped off there for a day on our voyage home last year. Naturally my plans are partly dependent on Helen's. Another silly promise Bob wrung out of me was that I wouldn't go streaking around alone this summer."

"I always thought Bob had a number of very sound ideas. And we'll keep you at Star Hundred as long as we can, you may be sure of that."

It was true that nothing had changed at Star Hundred; its air of permanence was unaltered. The house still rose serenely, mellowed by age and elegant to the eye, its old bricks and white stone-work

screened by ivy, amidst the lush lawns that stretched out smoothly towards the green yews and the copper beeches. Besides the practices that Guy had mentioned as unaltered, hot water was still brought in shining kettles to carpeted bedrooms draped in gay chintz, grate fires were still built from the contents of equally shining coalscuttles, and tea was still served under trees at the edge of the rose garden. Lord Grenville was there to welcome them, his skin as ruddy, his hair as crisp as ever; the undefinable resemblance between his wife and himself had grown greater with the years. He had retired from active service as a Government official, "Now that this lad of mine is really beginning to carry on, after a fashion, in my stead," as he chaffingly put it; and he seemed content with the prospect of playing the traditional part of the country squire for the rest of his natural life. "This is fine summer weather, isn't it?" he went on. "I don't ever remember seeing it finer. And from my point of view, nothing's likely to disturb it. You don't see anything that resembles bombing-planes skimming along there against the sky, do you, Doña Elena?"

Helen could see nothing skimming along the sky, which was a soft baby blue, except some white clouds, which looked to her like the soft, fuzzy things which babies habitually wore in England, and which, therefore, were particularly appropriate to go with both baby blue and English skies. She glanced at her hosts when she made the comparison, and Lord and Lady Grenville both smiled back at her understandingly. They had grown very fond of her and they heartily hoped there would be no more delay in their only son's courtship. They had reached the time when the idea of a charming, tranquil daughter-in-law was far from displeasing to them, and the prospect of possible future grandchildren delightful.

The first few days of the visit passed off uneventfully and lazily. It was not until Christopher Semple appeared on the scene and pre-empted Zoe's attention, that Guy made any move to detach Helen from her sister-in-law, and in the meantime he had paid Zoe the compliment of talking to her confidentially several times, both about family matters and about public events. One day he asked her a question that started a new train of thought running through her mind.

"You go everywhere and know everybody, Zoe. Did you ever come across a German named Keppler?"

"Dozens of them. That's almost like asking me if I ever came across an American named Smith. Why?"

"Well, the British Intelligence has reason to be rather suspicious of the Keppler I mean. His Christian name's Georg. Or do Germans have Christian names any more? Perhaps I ought merely to say his first name. They think he's doing some highly successful subversive work in the States—heading a small secret propaganda agency. But so far, they haven't any proof of it. And, of course,

they have to be very careful about accusations, especially with Anglo-American relations as delicate as they are right now. A year or so hence that situation will probably be different."

"I hope so. Well, the name Georg Keppler doesn't seem to ring a bell anywhere at the back of my alleged brain at the moment, but if it should, later on, I'll let you know. What does Georg look like?"

"Oh, *echt Deutsch*—or whatever the outsider usually pictures as *echt Deutsch*—paunchy, sharp-nosed, spectacled, bald-pated, and with a big roll of fat at the base of a perfectly flat head, where it joins the equally flat shoulders in the back. Can you explain to me why Germans, and only Germans, have a roll of fat in that particular place?"

"I'm afraid I can't. And your description isn't very helpful either. There are too many *echt Deutsch* just like that for me to identify this particular specimen, itemized like that."

"I'm afraid there are. But if you should happen to see anyone of that description with the same name, scurrying more or less unobtrusively around either New York or Washington, give me a hint, will you?"

She promised that she would, and tucked the matter away in her "alleged" mind, from which, in spite of her self-deprecation, she had an extraordinary faculty for drawing stored-up material at will. Guy did not speak to her on the subject of Herr Kepler again or, indeed, on any other confidential subject. For shortly after that, while they were all having tea in the garden, he reminded Helen that she had not yet been to see the repair work on the pavilions which had been done especially for her benefit.

She rose, readily enough, and walked with him through the gardens towards the lake. It was after tea, and the long English gloaming which she had always found so soothing and lovely had already set in. They spoke very little as they went along, but Helen found this restful also; the silences between herself and Guy had never disturbed her as the silences between herself and Dabney did, because she knew they could be ended at any time, with the sort of talk she liked best. It was only when silences seemed unavoidable that they ceased to be companionable and became awkward or menacing. And when she and Guy reached the pavilion, he ended this one by taking her unresisting hand and looking at her earnestly yet gladly.

"I have some news for you that I hope is going to please you as much as it does me."

"Tell it to me. I'd like to hear it."

"There's going to be a new British Ambassador in Washington."

"Well, that will please lots of people, and my mother will be one of them. But I've had a very nice time in Washington, and so have

Bob and Zoe, without going to the British Embassy. So it really doesn't make a lot of difference to me."

"I believe it may. I rather hope it may. Because, besides the usual staff of secretaries and attachés, and so on, there's a movement taking shape to appoint a Minister also, possibly two of them, to relieve the Ambassador of much of his present routine."

"Well?"

"Well, I have a sound reason for expecting that I might get such an appointment."

"As British Minister to the United States?"

"Yes. That would be rather jolly, don't you think it would?"

"I think it would be wonderful. It's a great honour. But you deserve it, Guy. You'd be perfect in that position."

"You would, too, you know."

His clasp on her hand grew a little firmer, his expression of earnestness still gladder. He waited, without impatience, for her to return his expectant smile. She did so with no confusion and with the archness which had always charmed him.

"Are you sure you think so?"

"I'm certain of it. I think you'd do much better at it than as mistress of Sycamore Forest or as Admiral's Lady in Shanghai."

"Of course it isn't just a question of whether I'd do well in it. I'd want to, I'd try to, I'm willing to believe I could if you say so. But there's also the question of whether I'd enjoy it."

"I'm certain of that also. I'm ready to devote my life to seeing that you do."

"Outside of working hours, of course? You would have to spend some time at that stark-looking Chancery, I suppose?"

"A little, I'm afraid, now and then. But possibly you could find some means of diversion during my absence. In wholly feminine society, of course."

"Oh, of course! Except for my brother. I'm very fond of my brother."

"Do you think he'd give you away? Or would your father do that? Perhaps your mother wouldn't let your father do it, considering how she feels about the British."

"You should have heard how she felt about the Mexicans. I think she feels better about the British now that she did get to the Garden Party. I think she'd let Father do it. But Bob will if he won't. I've already asked Zoe if she'd let me be married in their house."

"And what did she say?"

"She said 'yes.' But she said she hoped that, sooner or later. I'd specify to whom. Shall we go and tell her?"

"There's no hurry, is there? That is, we could tell her later in the evening, instead of now, couldn't we? The Pater and Mater, too. They'll be very pleased."

"I'm very pleased myself," Helen said demurely.

Zoe's presence was absolutely superfluous at Star Hundred, she told Helen, after receiving her sister-in-law's smiling announcement that she had accepted Guy so that all the Mortons would be sure of invitations to the British Embassy in the future. It was all very well to treat the whole matter as a joke. But Zoe knew the very reason Helen could afford to do this was because the engagement had such a firm foundation for future happiness. It had been carefully considered on both sides. There was great congeniality of taste and a fortunate similarity of temperament. Opening before this couple was the sort of life they both liked best to lead and for which they were both best suited, and they had the culture, the wealth and the experience which would enable them to get the most out of it. They were affectionately attached to each other and regarded each other with great mutual admiration. Here at last, Zoe said, was the marriage which could be accurately described as "safe."

She said it without bitterness. She had always hoped Guy would win out in the end and she knew Bob had hoped so too. She sent Bob a cable herself, to supplement the one from Helen, and asked him to arrange for the announcement of the engagement in the Washington and Arkansas papers. And she warned Lady Grenville that it would be differently worded from the one prepared for the London press.

"We don't say: 'A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place.' We never admit that it's been 'arranged,' and usually it hasn't been. And at home no one ever calls Helen Doña Elena de Terraza. Almost everyone still calls her Helen Morton. I'm going to save the English clippings and show them to Bob. He'll be amused."

"Amused, my dear?"

"Please don't misunderstand me, Lady Grenville. He'll be terribly pleased, too. I meant he'd be amused at the wording and the make-up, not at the engagement itself. Everything's so different in the British and American press. Now, we put our most important news on the front page, with headlines that will scream out at the public, and you bury it somewhere in the middle of the paper, so that people will have to hunt for it. I think it's very characteristic of the two schools of thought."

"You can't complain of the British school of thought yourself, Zoe. All our reviewers have sung your praises to the sky."

"Yes, they've been very good to me. I appreciate it too. I haven't told you because we've all been so preoccupied with Helen, but Mr. Semple and I have agreed on another book. I'm going to amplify my Mexican sketches, just as I amplified 'Deserted Dooryard' and 'Cherished Orchard' to produce 'Vagrant Cherry.' He hadn't seen

the Mexican material before because it hadn't come out in England, but now I've shown it to him, and he likes it very much. We're going to keep the original title of one of the sketches in this case, 'Indian Plantain.' I can work the subjects of the other sketches in with this main idea. I must go up to London next week to sign the contract, and I'll see some of the big shots there at the same time—Chamberlain, Sir John Simon, Hore-Belisha. Then I think I'll go over to France, to one of the quiet places in Normandy that I'm fond of, and begin the rewriting of the sketches and do the current pieces for 'World Kaleidoscope' at the same time. When Helen gets ready to come over, I'll join her in Paris and see the French big shots—Daladier, Bonnet, Reynaud, Herriot. Then we can see about getting a car and starting for Spain. I want to take the trip through France slowly, to get the feel of things in the Provinces as well as Paris, and I want to go back to Lourdes; I'll write about the French big shots and go on with my book there. Then I'll find some place in Spain to repeat the process a third time; not Burgos, except for a few days, that will be too crowded and noisy. Avila, maybe. It all sounds thrilling to me and I'm eager to get back to work. My husband's right. I'm always talking about taking a long rest, but, as a matter of fact, after a few days my fingers begin to itch to hold a pencil again."

They all tried, amiably and affectionately, to deter her from leaving, but at the same time they were forced to admit that her plan of action sounded pleasant as well as practical. She went up to London on the same train as Christopher Semple, whose "week-end" visit, lasting from Thursday afternoon to Tuesday morning, had given her ample time to prepare for her own departure. As they approached London long lines of sombre sheds, painted steel grey, attracted her attention. Idly she asked Mr. Semple what they were.

"Do you really mean you don't know? Those are the new air-raid shelters."

"All those?"

He smiled rather wanly. "London's a fair sized city. And a pretty sober city these days. At a place like Star Hundred, where you sit in a rose garden and watch fleecy clouds go by, you forget for a little while. I hope too many people haven't been doing something of the sort for too long. Not that I mean to criticize Lord and Lady Grenville. They're the most gracious, gentle creatures in the world. But they're typical of their class and kind. And I'm afraid it's doomed."

"I don't feel especially cheered to hear you say so, when my sister-in-law, of whom I'm very fond, is about to marry their son. I've gone so far myself as to say it was the only 'safe' marriage I'd ever seen 'arranged.'"

"Oh, I think Guy Grenville will come through. There's still an ingenuous, boyish look about him, though I, suppose he's nearly

forty. But it's slightly deceptive, just as your sister-in-law's air of startled innocence is misleading, if you'll permit me to say so. She's a good deal more hard-headed than she looks, isn't she? Well, Guy Grenville is made of sterner stuff than his parents. He may not be altogether safe. I'm afraid no one is in these days. But he'll survive."

London had never been one of Zoe's favourite cities, and her approach to it, lined by the grim, grey air-raid shelters, had given her an uneasy sense of foreboding. Besides, as Christopher Semple had said, it was indeed a sober city in these days, and she needed a different atmosphere. Nostalgia for the quiet countryside of France suddenly filled her being, and as soon as she had seen the "big shots" and signed the contracts she took a plane from Croydon to Deauville, feeling that she could not bear to retard her arrival any longer, even by hours. The same sensation caused her to rush headlong from the landing field to the bus station at the airport; and in her haste she overlooked a protruding piece of iron, to which, when closed, the gates were attached in the centre. She stumbled over it and fell headlong, her handbag flying in one direction, her briefcase in another. When she picked herself up, dizzy with pain, she saw that one of her stockings was ripped open from knee to ankle, and that her leg was so badly barked that the skin was broken in places. It was bleeding already, and as soon as she recovered from her first shock and faintness, she pulled herself up and looked around, still in a dazed state, for a place where she could repair the damage. Her attempt at progress was futile, for the pain was now almost intolerable. The barked and bleeding leg amounted to nothing compared to a wrenched ankle which was so badly injured that she could neither step nor stand.

Rather tardily, but with typical volubility now that they were aroused, some of the bystanders came forward to help her, plying her with superfluous questions and suggesting unobtainable remedies. She was not going into Deauville on the bus; she had wired Monsieur Folz, the *patron* of the Auberge de Vieux Puits at Pont Audemer, to send a motor-car for her, and this, it appeared, after frantic investigation on the part of her rescuers, was nowhere in sight. It came snorting up with a flourish half an hour later, the driver showing telltale signs of having paused for refreshment along the way. He was profuse in his apologies; he had been misinformed as to the time of the plane's arrival; no one had been able to tell him how to get to the airport: he was desolated at the spectacle of Madame's mishap. But in one little minute he and those other brave fellows would have her hoisted into his car. *Doucement! Doucement!* There, that was very well, was it not?

It was not very well, but it was endurable. Zoe spent the hour which elapsed between her painful departure from the airport and

her arrival at the Vieux Puits in mapping out a plan of action which could, so to speak, include inaction. She was determined to stick to her schedule, and if her ankle were not broken, if it were only badly sprained, she might still be able to do this. There must be a doctor of sorts in Pont Audemer, who would come gravely to see her, wearing an aged frockcoat and a rather soiled cravat, and give more or less authentic advice on this point. After that, if it were just a sprain, one of the chambermaids, who were all friendly and capable, would help her with the soaking and bandaging. Well, she would ask Monsieur Folz to give her one of the rooms in the old building at the rear of the garden, where there were living-quarters leading on to a balcony, over the old sheds which now served as a garage. There was modern plumbing in this building, and the balcony, narrow as it was, provided a pleasant place for writing and for eating. From there she could look down on the arbour, and the old mill which had given the inn its name and where Flaubert had visualized his immortal Emma as leaning, and the gravelled space where ten tables were set out under striped umbrellas, and the little pool where trout, unmindful of their impending fate, swam indolently about until the boy, wearing the long blue blouse and the long pointed cap, came to lift them into his net, and carry them away, still flopping and floundering, for the clients who had ordered them for dinner. Zoe still had very little appetite, but she tried to fix her mind on the incomparable cuisine that awaited her. She would have trout for her own dinner, she decided, after a cocktail Vieux Puits—nowhere in Paris were there such good cocktails—and the bouillon of vegetables into which cream had been stirred. The veal with mushroom sauce would come next, and of course a bottle of some Alsatian wine would go with this, for Monsieur Folz specialized in the wines of his native region. She did not know whether she could possibly also eat that other specialty of the house which she liked so much, the soufflé made with rum and candied fruit, because she was almost certain to take two helpings of the veal. But if she could not eat the soufflé one day she would eat it another.

As a matter of fact, she got no further than the bouillon that night, and succeeded in getting so far only with considerable difficulty. The pain was a good deal worse by evening, but the doctor, whom she had visualized with surprising accuracy, gave her something to make her sleep, and Angèle, the chambermaid of her choice, was untiring in her ministrations. By leaning on Angèle's arm, Zoe was able to hobble out on the balcony the following morning, and all day long she sat and wrote about the "big shots" she had seen in London, entrusting the envelope containing her first piece to Angèle for the *Bureau des Postes*, and writing out a cable for her to send to Bob at the same time, giving him her address without telling him of her injury. She did not write to

Helen about it either. She thought that probably by the time Helen arrived in Paris she would be able to join her there.

She was not lonely, except in the evenings, during the next ten days, and though she suffered a good deal she did not stay in bed, and she managed to write steadily and productively. She had received a cable from Bob, before she left London, expressing his pleasure over Helen's engagement; now she had another, saying he was glad she was settled in a place she liked so much, that he was looking forward to getting her pieces, and that he was writing. He sent her two copies of the letter, one via the *Normandie* and the other via the new Clipper service, and both reached her with almost incredible speed, only twenty-four hours apart. She read the second copy with as much absorption and excitement as she had the first, having devoured the contents of that several times during the interval.

"DARLING,

"You already know from my cables how pleased I am at all the news you sent me. A letter from Helen has just come in, very smug sounding, if you ask me, and saying you told her she could be married in our house, if I were willing too, which of course I am. She didn't mention a date, but I assume some time next winter.

"I have a love affair of sorts to report myself, for the office has been 'riddled with romance' as you predicted long ago it would be if we took on a mixed staff, but which we did escape for quite a while. I came in the other evening on the dead gallop, the way I usually do when I've been on the Hill all day and have just barely time to pound out my story, and as I opened the door I heard Bert talking in a voice I hardly recognized as his, because the drawl was all gone and the pleasantness too. The door of his room was shut and he wasn't speaking loudly, but still I couldn't help overhearing every word as plainly as if it had been articulated in my ear. And what he was saying was this: 'If you ever lay your dirty hands on my girl again, you lousy Latin, I'll beat you to such a pulp your own mother wouldn't know you.'

"I hesitated a moment, because I didn't feel sure whether it was just the place for me to leap into the breach or not, and in that moment I took in Gracie, sitting at her desk with a pencil behind each ear and gum in her mouth; so by the natural process of deduction I was able to conclude she wasn't the one Bert was designating as his girl. (Gracie has rather reverted to some of the habits of which you broke her, since you've been gone, so I hope you won't stay away long enough to let them get fastened on her again. Furthermore, she's started wearing a new type of blouse, cut in a V which I note the advertisements in the *Examiner* are describing as 'perilous,' and which taken in conjunction with the 'uplifts' is certainly something.) I never knew in all this time that Bert had a

girl; in fact, I've sometimes thought he hadn't discovered women, except as news or incidentally as reporters—that's probably not very well put, but I'm sure you'll get the idea, because you are used to my clumsy way of saying things. So then I instinctively waited, resisting the temptation to ask Gracie if she could give me any enlightenment, to see whose voice I would hear next. And it wasn't a girl's at all, it was Emilio's. He didn't sound either truculent or abject, but he did sound apologetic, and I gathered at once that he really hadn't meant to be offensive, that he had just made a mistake in technique, which of course any Latin is apt to do from time to time with an American business girl, because the whole method of approach is so different north and south of the Rio Grande. After that Bert began to growl, still pretty belligerently at first, and then with less and less fierceness, and in one of the brief pauses between his mutterings, Gracie shifted her gum and spoke to me.

"May hoped you wouldn't need her any more tonight, Mr. Morton," she said. "Her head was just about to burst, so she went home. She said if that wasn't all right by you, to call her, and she'd try to stagger back. She arranged for the mimeographing before she left. That new girl in the next office, who thinks she's such a whiz as a publicity expert and who hasn't had a regular job in six months, is glad of the chance to take it over tonight. . . . The Vice-President's secretary called. Say, he's a smoothy, isn't he? And two Congressmen. I guess they were both hicks, from their voices. And Mr. Hunter's mother—I can't pronounce her name in Eytalian. She's having a terrible time with dinner, and she hoped you'd fill in, because she says it's practically impossible to get anyone to eat with the Eytalians now. I'm not surprised. I never did like spaghetti myself. I've put the list on your desk. Will that be all for tonight, or do you want me to wait and take in your piece to the publicity expert?"

"I told her I'd do that myself, and I went on into my own office and started writing. But I left the door open and by and by I saw Emilio go out, looking so unusually spruce and jaunty that I suspected it was his way of hiding the feeling of slinking off with his tail between his legs. Then Beverley came into the outer office. When she saw I was at my desk she stopped at the threshold. She didn't come any further than that, but I could see she looked lovely. There was a light in her face, if you know what I mean. I guess you do.

"Are you going out anywhere tonight, Bob?" she asked.

"I've got an SOS here from Candace Fopiano," I said. "According to Gracie, the Eytalians are having trouble getting anyone to eat with them nowadays. But I shan't lose much sleep over that, or let it use up my evening either, if I find anything better to do. Why?"

"Nothing much. But Bert would like to see you before you

leave, if you're not in a hurry. I told him I'd tell you so as I went out.'

"I said I wasn't in a hurry, that I'd wait, and she went along, still looking lovely, in that queer lighted way. I finished my piece, took it into the publicity expert, and started filing. Before I got through Bert came in.

"'You came near having a nice juicy murder right here in your own office this afternoon,' he said. He was drawling again though, and he looked at me with what passes for a smile on Bert, so I thought I might as well break down and tell him about my eaves-dropping first as last.

"'I know I did,' I said. 'I came into the door just as you were giving our Argentine collaborator his choice between discretion and disfigurement. I thought you put it to him very forcibly.'

"'He's been annoying Beverley ever since he came here,' Bert said. 'I told you that fellow's ways were as slick as his hair. Not but what he knows his stuff, and but what he can write. He had Beverley sized up wrong though.'

"'I'm very sorry,' I said. And of course I was. Then it seemed natural to add, 'Do you want me to fire him? Of course, if it came to a question between you and him, or Beverley and him, you know darn well which I'd choose.'

"'No, I don't want you to fire him,' Bert said. 'Let him stay on and do his stuff. I don't think he'll do anything else from now on. Because I told him, pointblank, that Beverley and I were going to be married next week, and when he found out that she was my *novia* and that she was about to be my *señora*, his tune changed abruptly. He's all apologies and respect now. Of course, it's a sign of a filthy mind when a man needs to catch the glint of a wedding-ring on a girl's finger to know what sort she is. But it really doesn't matter much to Beverley or to me either.'

"There was a pause for just a minute, and I said I thought he was very fortunate and that I knew he'd be very happy. I figured that then he'd probably go along and I could still get to Candace's dinner on time. I do feel sort of sorry for the old girl, thinking she'd done such a smart thing to marry an Italian nobleman, and then finding out she hadn't, at least as far as Washington was concerned. But Bert stood right where he was and I knew there was something on his chest that he was going to get off before he moved.

"'I've been trying to get Beverley to marry me for a long time,' he said. 'But I couldn't budge her. I didn't know of anything she could have against me except my looks, and when I finally wrung it out of her that she didn't mind those at all she had me foxed. Because I could see she liked me. Well, I kept at her, and finally she broke down and said she would never marry me or anybody else, because once she had had an affair and marriage was out as far

as she was concerned. And I cut her short right there, and said, hell, what did she take me for if she thought I didn't know that, and who the guy was, not such a bad guy either. And that if this guy's wife, who was simply tops, could take it on the chin the way she had, I guessed I could do a little taking myself. Not that it would be so much for me to take at that.'

"I don't believe I'll tell you everything Bert and I said to each other after that, because it was a strictly male conversation, and it doesn't seem to me necessary to go into all the details, even with you, unless you especially want to hear them. But the upshot of it all is that he and I are better friends than ever, and that this little fracas with Emilio was just enough to tip the scales in his favour, as far as Beverley is concerned, and that she's got a lot of renewed faith in human nature and a lot of hope for the future that she didn't have before. She's been very simple and natural with me, and she's said some things that mean a lot, coming from her, and I know you'd understand that too. I wish more than ever now that you were here, because they would have been so glad to have you at a time like this, and because I think you'd have offered to let them be married in our house too. It would have been just like you. But, anyway, since you're not here, I've told you all about it, the best I could, which I realize is pretty poor compared to the way you would have written the same story.

"And, darling, won't you write and say that this will help as far as you and I go? Because I've never been so happy in my life as I was between the time I found you at Lourdes and that dreadful night you asked me whether I had ever proposed to anyone but you. Not even when we were first married and everything had a sort of glow to it. You've been so brave and so big about so many things that I wonder whether you wouldn't write and tell me that we don't ever need to talk about this again. Of course we won't ever be able to forget it, any more than Ronnie will forget what you reminded me she'd always have to remember, and what I like a crazy fool had forgotten would hurt her like hell no matter how happy she seemed. But we can sort of put it behind us—that is, if you are willing. I believe if you told Mère Marie Alphonse about it—and as far as I'm concerned you may—she would say the same thing. She might even say the good Lord had helped us to solve our troubles and had shown us that He wanted everything to work out for us better than we dared to hope. And, whatever she says, let me say once more, this last time, that if any man was ever sorry for what he did, I am. And also let me say, and this isn't for the last time by a long shot, that if any man ever loved his wife, I do.

"I don't know how many American papers you are seeing, but probably very few, judging from my own experiences abroad, so I'm enclosing some clippings. I thought you'd be interested in the strike of the W.P.A. workers against longer hours, and the Presi-

dent's appeal for an arms embargo repeal. Personally, I don't believe Harry Bridges will be deported. The appointment of the new Federal Security Administrator is considered very good in most quarters. It looks now as if the Hatch Bill will go through pretty soon. I take it for granted you sent me a piece on Chamberlain's attitude about the 'special requirements' of Japan's army in China. If you get any good advance dope on the rumoured military mission to Moscow, please cable it. Also anything else of that nature that looms up in front of you but that I might not see from here. Remember not to work too hard and not to stir out of France except to go to Spain. If you come home with a cough I'll choke you."

Zoe read the second copy of the letter for the fifth time, and then she called to Angèle, who was trudging down the gravel walk through the harbour and past the trout pool, carrying an enormous platter of apricot tarts.

"Can you go to the *Bureau des Postes* again for this evening, Angèle? I want to send another message to my husband."

"*Mais oui, madame. Une toute petite seconde.*"

Angèle put down the platter on one of the tin tables, calling to another maid to come and get it. Then she trudged back across the gravel and up the stairway which led, on the outside of the old thatched building, to the gallery where Zoe was sitting. She studied the sheet of paper which Zoe had given her attentively, though she could not read a word of what was written on it, because this was all in English.

"Here are two hundred francs, Angèle. I don't think the message will cost that much, but you may keep whatever's left. Be sure to bring me a receipt, so I'll know it's really gone. And hurry, please. Because the *Bureau des Postes* closes at six o'clock nowadays, doesn't it?"

"Yes, madame. But do not disquiet yourself. I shall be there. And a thousand thanks, madame."

Zoe looked after Angèle's retreating figure with a pleased smile. Then she picked up the carbon of the cable she had sent and read it through, her tired face settling into lines of peace as she did so.

"HAVE YOUR LETTER DELIGHTED AT YOUR NEWS MY BEST TO BERT AND BEVERLEY STOP WILL CABLE STORIES AS REQUESTED STOP GLAD I CAME OVER BUT LOOKING FORWARD TO THE HAPPIEST HOMECOMING YET WE WILL PUT EVERYTHING BACK OF US THAT BELONGS THERE STOP ALL MY LOVE ZOE."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ZOE heard from Helen, earlier than she had expected, suggesting a meeting in Paris the first week in August. Guy's leave had been curtailed, owing to "abnormal conditions," and Helen preferred being where she could see him, and joining Zoe, to staying on at Star Hundred without him. The date of his probable promotion and transfer to Washington was still uncertain, and for the moment he would continue to be attached to the British Embassy in Paris. Helen thought that she and Zoe would find things made very pleasant for them. Should they go to the Maurice, or did Zoe prefer the Crillon?

Zoe would infinitely have preferred a small, inconspicuous "Left Bank" hotel, like the Jeanne d'Arc on the Rue Vaneau, near her old haunts. But she did not tell Helen so. She left Pont Audemer with regret, took the same rickety car in which she had gone there from Deauville, and reached the Maurice in time to get installed in their suite before her sister-in-law's arrival. Helen was horrified when she found her extended on a *chaise-longue*, her writing materials heaped around her, but her right leg bandaged from knee to ankle.

"Why didn't you tell me you had been hurt? I'd have come to you right away. Have you had a decent doctor? Have you cabled Bob about this? You can't possibly take a trip through France in such a condition!"

"I didn't tell you I'd been hurt for the very reason that I knew, if I did, you'd leave Star Hundred. I've had the best—in fact, the only—doctor there was at Pont Audemer, and I've made arrangements to have this darn ankle X-rayed at the American hospital tomorrow morning, if that's any comfort to you. Certainly I haven't cabled Bob about it, and if you do anything of the sort you'll rue the day you ever saw me. Of course, I'm a reformed character, and all that, but I still can be vicious when roused. And, of course, I can take a trip across France in this condition. I've taken writing trips when I had impacted wisdom teeth and dysentery and mountain sickness and undulant fever and bronchial pneumonia, to mention just a few little physical handicaps. Maybe you don't know the slogan the press has borrowed from the old Pony Express; it used to be 'The mail goes through,' now it's 'The news goes through.' In the good old days Indians and rattlesnakes and waterless deserts weren't supposed to make any difference to the relay riders, and they didn't; you may be sure that a little thing like a sprained ankle isn't supposed to make any difference to a foreign correspondent."

"You can't drive a car with a sprained ankle, can you?"

"Well, have you forgotten how to drive a car since you became engaged to a nobleman of high degree? If you have we can always get a chauffeur. But I think we'd have a lot more fun knocking about by ourselves the way we used to. This may be the last chance we'll ever have to do it."

Guy was inclined to take the same viewpoint that Helen at first did, and, surprisingly enough, this was what changed Helen's. He thought it would be much better if Zoe went home, almost at once, staying only long enough to see Helen married to him in Paris. He said this, as he thought, tactfully and not too insistently; but Helen shied away from his suggestion like a startled filly, as Dabney would have put it.

"Zoe can't go home now. She's undertaken to cover the European scene, part of it, anyway, and she's got to do it. Her bureau has a lot of money tied up in this trip of hers."

"I thought Zoe and Bob were very comfortably situated now. If I was mistaken, you could offer to pay her expenses, couldn't you?"

"Good gracious, Guy, it isn't a question of her expenses! Of course she's got enough money for those. She and Bob aren't rich by any means; their house isn't paid for yet; they keep putting a lot more money back into the bureau, and Zoe helps her family all the time. I'm afraid they haven't much of anything saved up. But they are forging further and further ahead, and the reason they are is because they are giving the American public the sort of news it wants through a big syndicate. If Zoe went home now she might miss some very exciting events."

"She undoubtedly would. Somewhat too exciting for comfort, if you'll permit me to say so, my dear. That's one of the reasons why I think you and I had better be married at once."

"If it isn't safe for Zoe to stay here it can't be safe for me to stay here either. Besides, I don't want to be married in Paris among strangers; I want to be married at home with all my friends around me. I've told you that from the beginning. I've also told you I wouldn't be hurried into getting married under any circumstances. I want to be engaged for at least six months. A year would be better."

"Helen, these aren't normal times. No one can tell what will be happening six months from now, much less a year from now. Let's snatch what happiness we can, while we can."

"I'm perfectly happy being engaged to you. At least, I was, until you began to talk like this. You're not one of those dictatorial Englishmen I've heard so much about, are you? Because, if you are, I think we'd better not be engaged after all. I think we'd better just go on being good friends."

"Helen, you can't mean that."

"I do mean it. I can see it was a mistake to announce the engagement immediately. It would have been better to have an informal understanding first, until we could see how things worked out. I think we'd better do that now. We won't make a second announcement, saying that the engagement is broken, since it's been made publicly. But, privately, I think it would be better to consider that we're going through a probation period."

Nothing that Guy could say or do and nothing that Zoe could say or do, when she heard about this conversation, sufficed to alter Helen's attitude. She put in an appearance—a very charming and complacent appearance—with Guy at the functions which had already been planned in their honour, less numerous than they would have been earlier in the season; but she begged to be excused from committing herself to any more, on the ground that the date of her departure from Paris was uncertain. She did not know exactly how long it would take Zoe to see the most important "big shots" or to grasp the essentials of the general situation from her own observation. But as soon as Zoe had done that they must be on their way through Spain.

It did not take her very long, in spite of her physical handicap. She knew her way about Paris extremely well, both figuratively and literally, and the tone which had characterized her articles during the strikes of '36 had not prevented her from remaining *persona grata* in most quarters. She saw everything she wanted within the course of comparatively few days. A cable to Bob asking him to agree to a hurried flight to Warsaw and Moscow, coupled with the assurance that she would keep her promise to stay out of Germany, except for the necessary stops, brought an affirmative answer, and she started off at a few hours' notice, covered an amazing amount of ground, and securing a still more amazing amount of material. On her return to Paris, exhausted but triumphant, she found a letter explaining the basis of his consent.

"DARLING,

"I've just cabled my consent to this mad dash you want to make into Poland and Russia, more or less against my better judgment. I don't believe you're physically fit to attempt it. (Are you really all right? You're suspiciously silent about your health!) And I agree with you that in the long run a survey of provincial France and the situation in Spain may be most valuable to us, in every sense of the word. But we've just had an extraordinary offer, too good to decline, and in the face of it I think you ought to see as much as you can before hell breaks loose, which I'm now convinced that it's going to, any day. I don't suppose I need to tell you that if war is declared I want you to come back on the first boat you can catch. There was nothing in our bargain

about covering wars, and we'll take up that point on this side of the Atlantic, please. I'm not joking about this, Zoe. I'm very serious.

"The offer is for a weekly broadcast, to be given under the dual title of 'Capital Kaleidoscope and World Kaleidoscope.' The idea is that you and I will alternate on the air—one week you'll take the 'World' and I the 'Capital,' and the next week we'll switch around and you'll take the 'Capital' and I the 'World.' The series is to start October 15, with the understanding that if you're not back by then—though you better be!—I'm to take over all the programmes until you get here. I'm also to do it at any other time, within reason, when you don't find it convenient to do them, though I'm sure you're a bigger drawing card than I am. The contract is for a six-months' period, with a renewal clause. In other words, we can't switch to some rival broadcasting company that might like to play a cut-throat game, if we're unexpectedly good, and, on the other hand, we can't oblige the company that's made the offer to keep us on if we're unexpectedly poor. I've had my voice tested, and it's all right. It seems yours has already been passed on the strength of that book-review interview you gave when 'Vagrant Cherry' came out, and some of the speeches you've made before women's clubs when you've used a mike. While I'm on the subject of speeches before women's clubs, I might say that a New York agent would like to book you for a tour, with a guarantee of \$500 per speech average, but I've taken the responsibility of turning the offer down in your behalf, because I don't think it's really as good as it looks. The agent's fee would be 35 per cent., and then you'd still have all your travelling expenses to meet, and all the wear and tear of the trips to get over besides. I haven't forgotten the time you came back from Wisconsin, after arriving at Fond du Lac in a blizzard at one-thirty in the morning with no one to meet you and no porters or taxis at the station, and a three hundred mile jump to the next place you were due the following evening. Your doctor's bills were just double what you got for that speech, weren't they? And as I recall it it was only one of several a good deal like it.

"This time we've been offered \$500 a week net to start with, and we have the promise of more after six months if we make good. There's no travelling connected with it, and though we're supposed to send in prepared manuscripts beforehand, we're to be allowed a certain amount of discretion in regard to ad-libbing. And, of course, it's wonderful publicity for the bureau, quite aside from the pay. I should think we might almost double the number of our subscribers on the strength of it.

"I hope you don't think I've taken too much on myself by deciding to accept this without consulting you. The whole matter seemed a little too complicated to go into by cable, and I had to

give a quick answer. Personally, I think it's the biggest lift we've ever had, and I'm tickled to death about it.

"I think you're the grandest girl in the world and I love you. I think you're doing a swell job where you are, and I miss you.

"BOB."

Zoe cabled her enthusiastic reception of this news the day she and Helen left Paris. It was the same day that Russia and Germany signed a ten-year non-aggression pact, that France and England called out their reserves, and that the President of the United States sent peace appeals to Germany, Poland and Italy. Zoe declined to admit there was any reason why any of this should make a difference in her plans, and Helen, in the face of renewed objections on the part of Guy, stubbornly upheld her.

They met with some disappointments and some difficulties along the way, but nothing that they could actually call dangers. The barracks in every town through which they passed were disgorging soldiers, and often, when they stopped overnight, they saw the same men who had been going along the streets in civilian clothes, carrying cheap little suitcases or paper parcels, repassing, a few hours later, dressed like poilus. The roads were occasionally blocked with troops, but when this happened the girls drew up at the side and waited for the men to pass, and there was always a gay exchange of salutations under these conditions. Occasionally they had trouble in buying gasoline, on the ground that orders had been issued to save it for the military *camions*, and after one disastrous experience of getting stuck on a hill because they were entirely out of it, they learned to ask for it frequently, buying it when and where they could be accommodated, and keeping an extra can in the back of the car. They could not make reservations ahead, for telegrams were no longer accepted except through official channels, and the mail, moving slowly at best because the trains had been commandeered for troops, was already subject to censorship. So sometimes they slept in rather queer places—in the last available rooms, tucked under the eaves in supposedly first-class hotels, in a village *auberge* with few pretensions at sanitation, at a wayside farmhouse with no such pretensions at all. But the beds were always soft and the food was always excellent, and everywhere Zoe had a chance to talk with persons she had been so avidly determined to examine; the *concierges* and *garagistes*, the *femmes-de-chambre* and *valets-de-chambre*, the *garçons* and *sommelières*, the *directeurs* of the allégedly first-class hotels, the *patrons* of the village inns, the farmers whose first suspicious surliness so quickly changed to excited volubility. She saw *préfets* and *sous-préfets* and mayors and shopkeepers and *restaurateurs* and *chefs*. The hotels were crowded with officers and their families; she very often found a way of presenting herself, unaggressively, as an American jour-

nalist, when she and Helen were sharing a table with Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, and before long they were pouring out their hearts to her, their faith in France, their hatred of Germany, their fears for the dark days that lay ahead, their hopes for days which lay further still ahead and which they believed might be brighter. She succeeded in getting also into small newspaper offices, where the editor and the proprietor were one and the same, and more than ready to exchange views with her; she made a frequent practice of trying to cash Express cheques in small denominations, not because she needed money, with which she was plentifully supplied, but because she wanted to gauge the willingness of the clerks to supply her with funds and to draw her own conclusions, from the excuses with which they declined to do this, or the continued trustfulness which they showed in the omnipotence of the American dollar. Any lingering doubts left in her mind as to the wisdom of her course in quitting the French capital for the French countryside, in her quest for material, had been dissipated long before she reached Limoges. By the time she reached Lourdes she had ceased to remember that she had ever hesitated between the two.

Helen had never known a nun or stayed under the shadow of a convent; she had the undefined fears of many Protestants concerning both, and in deference to this feeling—which she understood without sharing—Zoe had written before leaving Paris to a hotel which had been recommended to her in Lourdes, instead of automatically going first to Mère Marie Alphonse. But when they drew up at the hotel door, after winding their way through the mystic city at the lovely hour of twilight, they were met at the door by a *patronne* whose lips were set in a hard line, and whose eyes were glittering with unshed tears.

"No, *madame*, I have never received your letter," she said in answer to Zoe's query. "But if I had, the situation would still be the same. It is impossible for me to receive you. My hotel has been requisitioned by the Government. It must be stripped of all its equipment, and be ready for reoccupancy within five days. Have you not heard the news over T.S.F.* today? Germany has invaded Poland. This is the beginning of the end."

In the entrance hall at the *patronne's* back, Zoe could see two workmen, ruthlessly ripping up a carpet and tossing it into a corner, before attacking, with equal vigour, the ornamental hangings on the walls. A cloud of white dust surrounded them, and their blue blouses were soaked with sweat. A little girl ran out, put her arms around the *patronne* and clung to her, tremblingly, and the woman, still looking at Zoe with pitiful defiance, smoothed back the child's brown hair from her brow with a reassuring hand. Zoe's own eyes softened as she looked at her.

* The main network of the French broadcasting system.

"I am very sorry, *madame*. We've been driving all day and we have no radio in our car. We hadn't heard of the invasion. Do you know of any other hotel where we might go?"

"Most of them have been closed already. Naturally, pilgrims are not permitted to come here any more, because all trains are required for the movement of troops. The season was almost over in any case, and now it is ended abruptly. Nearly all the male servants have already been mobilized. I could not suggest any place in Lourdes where you would be comfortable. It would probably be better that you should return to Pau."

"Thank you, *madame*. I will consult my sister-in-law and see what she prefers to do under these trying circumstances. Are there any messages here for Mrs. Morton, or Señora de Terraza? I know that very few local wires are coming through any more, but Señora de Terraza has connections with the British Embassy in Paris, and I think cables are still getting across from America. You see, we had expected this would be our address, and we had given instructions that communications should come here."

With obvious reluctance, the *patronne* went to look. "But, yes," she said on returning, surprise mingled with the other emotions she was trying to suppress in the expression on her face. She handed Zoe two folded slips of blue-grey paper, and a letter bearing a Pau postmark, stamped with the seal of the lion and the unicorn. The letter and one of the wires were for Helen. Zoe handed them to her, as she tore open her own cable, and briefly explained the situation in English.

"I really don't think you'd mind the clinic for one or two nights, Helen. It isn't a convent, you know, though it is run by nuns. It doesn't even seem much like a hospital. It looks more like a stereotyped suburban villa anywhere in France. And if I'm right on the spot, I'll have a better chance to talk to Mère Marie Alphonse, the way I want to, than if I were going back and forth to a hotel. I wouldn't have minded if we weren't in a hurry, but there isn't going to be much time to waste. Listen to this:

"'PLEASE START FOR NEAREST FEASIBLE PORT IMMEDIATELY AND ACCEPT FIRST AVAILABLE TRANSPORTATION STOP FRANTIC ABOUT YOU NO STORY WORTH IT LOVE BOB.'"

"Well, my messages were along the same lines. Guy's wired that he would rather know that I'm safe at home than to have me try to join him now, even if I were willing. And I haven't changed my mind about not wanting this to be a hasty marriage, in spite of the war, so I'm glad he feels the way he does. It will clear the air between us. The letter's from the British Vice Consul in Pau, with whom Guy's been in touch—it seems that the United States hasn't had consular representation there for more than a year. This man says he has private information that gasoline is about to be

rationed. He thinks we should go to Bordeaux right away. Apparently that's where Americans are congregating."

"All right. We'll start tomorrow morning. But let's go to the clinic now. You have to recross the railway line and go up through the town. I'll show you."

The letter which Zoe had written Mère Marie Alphonse some time before, saying that sooner or later she would show up in Lourdes, had reached the hospital. In an indefinite way she was expected, and the Sister had watched for her coming with mingled anxiety and eagerness. As she and Helen drove up to the main doorway, the Superior herself was standing in the arcade, as she had been on the occasion of Zoe's first arrival. She hastened out to welcome her, and when she saw that Zoe was disabled, to support and assist her.

"So you have come back to us, my daughter, in spite of all these tragic events! What, you are hurt! Then, of course, the clinic is the place for you. Sœur Stephanie will have a look at that ankle of yours at once. Come, I will get in the car and drive round with you. Never could you walk through the garden in such a state without great pain! And this charming young lady is your sister-in-law? Is her French as good as yours? Or must you act as interpreter again? There, I see you have not forgotten the way. And, felicitously, the rooms you had before are vacant."

Helen's French was not as good as Zoe's, in fact it was almost as poor as Bob's had been two years earlier. But she was able to grasp the purport of the Superior's meaning and to gauge the warmth of her welcome. The slight squeamishness she had felt regarding runs and convents evaporated into thin air with her first full look into the face of Mère Marie Alphonse; and as the other Sisters crowded around Zoe, kissing her on both cheeks, beaming at her benignly, and giving excited little cries of gladness and sympathy, Helen's last trace of malaise left her. She could feel the benevolence of these women beginning to touch her also. They did not leave her out in the cold, in their joy at seeing Zoe; they gathered her into their little fold also. The weariness she had felt after the long day's drive, the emptiness which filled her instead of normal hunger, the sense of unreality, shot through with suppressed fear over being in a strange land that was at war, the regret at the unexpected upheaval in her satisfactory relationship with Guy—little by little, all these streamed away from her, and she nestled down in the narrow white bed, where her brother had previously slept, in drowsy disregard of everything except the comfort and contentment of the moment. There was to be no more helter-skelter racing across a country already in a state of mobilization, and liable, at any moment, to invasion; no more trouble and tumult and uncertainty. In the morning she and Zoe would be on their way to Bordeaux, and soon a large luxurious ship would take them triumphantly

home, and presently Guy would come over and marry her, at a time and in a way of her choosing. Everything was coming out all right. She did not see why she had ever doubted this.

While Helen drifted off to sleep, reassured and relaxed, Zoe sat on the terrace and talked to Mère Marie Alphonse. She did not do so desperately and incoherently as she had when she first stumbled into the little parlour, frantic and feverish; she spoke calmly and collectedly, and she spoke confidentially too, earnestly asking the Superior's counsel and guidance in charting her future course. Mère Marie Alphonse did not interrupt her, and when she had finished, did not even answer her immediately. It was evident that she was prayerfully considering every aspect of what Zoe had said to her from many angles. At last she asked her question.

"My daughter, what means more to you than anything in the world that you have?"

"My husband's love."

"Then safeguard it. I believe that your husband is a man of integrity as well as intelligence, and I have seen for myself that he is sincerely devoted to you. But it is always the task of the wife rather than the husband to foster the pure flame of love, and keep it burning clearly and brightly on the hearthstone. Make this your chief care. In order to do so adequately, you may have to give up much that seems to you pleasurable and even important. You have overtaxed your strength and you are paying for that already; you must begin to conserve it. You have left your home and your husband a great deal in order to pursue your profession; you must leave them less. Indeed, I am almost prepared to say that you should not leave them at all."

"But that would mean giving up my profession, and my profession means a great deal to me also!"

"It might. I am not certain that you could not create, even more constructively than you are doing now, at your own fireside, though it would be a different kind of creation. But let us grant that it might. You have confessed to me, my daughter, that you have found many of the honours which have been heaped upon you empty, many of the profits vain. If this is true, would it cost you so much to give them up? I should not think so, in the end. But even suppose that you do renounce much that you value, what will that matter if you get in something you value more?"

"I don't think I had looked at it in quite that light before. But I will try from now on. Thank you, Reverend Mother, for causing this to become clear and for making me face it."

"Do not thank me. If I have been empowered to help you, thank God, Who in His wisdom and mercy has twice led you to me, first through strange and devious ways, and now at a time of great perplexity and peril for the whole world. Be sure that this has not been by accident, no matter how much it may seem so. It is all part of

His own wise plan. Now, let me ask you one more question. What is there which you have not, that it would mean more to you than anything else to possess?"

"A child."

"And why should you lose hope that God shall send you a child, when the way is prepared and the time ripe for its coming? You may still cherish that hope for ten years or more. I shall pray for you, my daughter, that your heart's sincere desire in this respect may be filled, should such be God's will. But before it is, you must build up your body, which is the temple of your soul, and set your mind at rest and turn trustfully to the Great Giver of Grace."

Mère Marie Alphonse rose and Zoe rose with her. She knew that the hour of the Great Silence was near, and that the Superior must leave her soon. But she hoped there might be a moment left in which Mère Marie Alphonse could speak to her, and she was not disappointed.

"Had the moment been other than it is, my daughter, I should have gone with you myself to the Grotto and asked you to join me there in prayer that you might keep your husband's love and bear this child for which you have long yearned, and also grow in the grace for which you have not yet asked. Even if you had prayed with little faith, greater faith might have come to you. But I myself will pray alone that all this may come to pass. For you must not linger here now, even to go to the Grotto, even to heal your hurt. You must leave early in the morning, you must take the road to Bordeaux, and there you must await the ship which will carry you to your home and your husband."

"Couldn't I go with you, very early, to the Grotto, and still reach Bordeaux tomorrow? I should like to do what you have described to me, Reverend Mother, even though I cannot pretend to you that I do so with faith."

Again the Superior appeared to consider. Finally she spoke once more.

"Yes, it is possible. And I believe that perhaps it is best after all. For there is no saying when you can come to Lourdes again, if ever, or whether, should you do so, I shall be spared to receive you a third time. I will send to your room very early, while your sister-in-law is still sleeping, to have you aroused, and we will go at dawn to the Grotto. It is a time of great beauty there and great peace. You will never forget what you see, and more may be made manifest than is visible to your eyes. And now, my daughter, I must leave you. But I will see you, this one time more, tomorrow. May your slumbers be blessed and your heart at rest."

CHAPTER XXXIX

ZOE and Helen crept sadly into Bordeaux, after a hard day's drive through a maze of one-way streets in which they kept losing their way. These streets were congested with bicycles, pedestrians and detachments of soldiers, and bewildered Americans, easily recognizable, were threading their way, in every direction, amidst the native population. The girls quickly came to the conclusion that their compatriots, who had been caught in France by the war, had shown greater docility than usual in coming to heel. The city was literally bulging with them. They were occupying the very last table in all the sidewalk cafés and, what was worse, also occupying every available room. The girls went to six hotels in succession, feeling increasingly discouraged each time they were turned away with a slight sneer and an indifferent shrug of the shoulders. Helen, who had never liked the French as well as Zoe, said that everything she had ever heard in their disfavour came back to her that evening. Not a single *patron* expressed regret at his inability to accommodate them; not one suggested the name of some other hotel where they might possibly find shelter. At last, almost frantic with fatigue, they located a big barren sort of hostelry where there was admittedly one vacant room left. They did not have spirit enough remaining by that time to inquire what it was like. While they were registering an importunate street urchin leapt forward and painted the headlights of their car dark blue, for which seemingly superfluous service he demanded ten francs; but as they were arguing with the boy about it, a passing *gendarme* brusquely told them that this was obligatory as black-out had already begun, and while he was talking, the street urchin produced some dark blue paper from his person, which he said must be pinned around their bedroom lights, the *gendarme* again corroborating him.

As they entered the cage of the hotel's palsied elevator, Zoe's drooping spirits were momentarily raised at the sight of a sign attached by a metal chain to the side of the car. "Please do *softly* when shutting *lift's* doors and kindly save noise," she read aloud, hoping that Helen would be amused too. But Helen was past feeling amused at anything. They walked through endless stale corridors and up and down several short flights of steps, covered with frayed carpet, before they reached their final destination, a courtyard room containing one large brass bed and the usual *armoire à glace*. It was situated directly over the kitchen and between the toilets, both of which were apparently overcrowded. The baggage was brought in and dumped unceremoniously on the floor, and

having overtipped the growling, superannuated porter who left it there, they flung themselves out of their clothes and climbed into the brass bed, unequal to the struggle of trying to secure food. But they did not get much sleep. A heated quarrel, confined at the moment to loud insults, but threatening to assume the proportions of a riot at any moment, made the kitchen rafters ring until long after midnight; and as Zoe muttered about three, everyone in the hotel apparently had dysentery. Under these circumstances slumber was necessarily fitful.

Each rose with a false but determined buoyancy which did not deceive the other, and after getting some lukewarm coffee with even more effort than they had foreseen, started for the consulate. They found this swarming with Americans in different stages of bewilderment which was quite unassuaged by anything or anyone there. The consul had been sent on, by one of those inexplicable vagaries of the Foreign Service, just three weeks earlier from Bombay. He knew nothing of local conditions and he had no staff; complete bedlam reigned. The French clerks had all been mobilized. The staff from Strasbourg, evacuated from there by French military orders and transferred by order of the Department of State to Bordeaux, had not arrived. Two or three well-meaning but muddled volunteers were saying that the consul was very busy, that unfortunately he could not see anyone just then, and handing out little slips of paper on which certain statistics—including the name of the relative to be notified in the event of the refugee's death—were supposed to be inscribed. Zoe and Helen filled these blanks out with the feeling that their grieving families would probably be kept in doubt for some time to come as to their fate, unless they took this into their own hands.

There seemed to be no immediate way of doing this, so they tried to divert their minds while awaiting developments. But apparently Bordeaux was not a city which offered many distractions, even under the most advantageous conditions. They found a fur shop where Helen bought ermine and Zoe bought silver fox, both superlatively good and pathetically cheap, but their zest for such purchases was lessened by the realization that they might need to conserve their cash, and by the knowledge that it might be difficult to get their treasures home. They discovered several excellent restaurants, and one, the *Chapon Fin* which was supreme when it came to sauce *Béarnais*, *cèpes de Bordeaux* and *Château Haut-Brion* '31. They lunched there nearly every day, for the service as well as the food stood out for its excellence on the general scene of disorder, and the decor—as Helen said with a smile, which was not meant to be irreverent—was curiously reminiscent of the Grotto at Lourdes, which made Zoe feel at home there. But lunch, even at the *Chapon Fin*, could not be prolonged indefinitely, and "circulation" presented complications, for the police took two hours off in

the middle of the day, leaving the most congested quarters with no direction of traffic, and every street-light was extinguished at sundown. The narrow thoroughfares had a cave-like quality at best and after dark there was something sepulchral about them. Depressing as it was to stay in the courtyard bedroom, or the cheerless, barren lobby of the hotel, Helen preferred this to prowling around in the opaque gloom of unrelieved darkness, and Zoe had not the heart to drag her out against her will unless there was some point to it. She herself crept out into the dark, groping her way to the corner kiosk to get a copy of *Paris Soir* and always hoping vainly that she might also be able to get a copy of the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune*. Instead she supplemented the *Paris Soir* with the *Petite Gironde*, the local sheet which ran to twenty-two editions a day and which was always dated a day in advance. There was usually a blank space under the heading of "Latest News," and very little of purport anywhere. But to Zoe any paper, however inadequate, was still a paper, and no black-out could be bad enough to keep her from getting one.

The difficulty of picking her way across the cobblestones, complicated now by the black-out as well as by her lameness, did not tend to make her any more philosophic herself; and she did not dare take out the car unnecessarily, for there was no telling when they would need it for an emergency and they had no assurance that they could get the tank refilled. But coming out of the consulate, at the end of her first siege there, she discovered an ancient *fiacre*, to which a lean and drooping horse was attached, standing at a corner, and hailing its *cocher*, suggested an hour's drive to Helen. After that they formed a habit of going out in it every day. The driver pointed out the sights of the city to them with his limp whip—the monumental fountain of the Girondins where the water had been drained off and the bronze sea-nymphs left swimming in space; the various ancient gates and the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre; the dignified educational institutions and pretty parks. Now and then an arresting figure stood out among the crowds; there was a one-armed priest whom they saw several times wearing a cassock, a Sam Browne belt, a poilu's cap and a strip of service ribbons across his heart; but for the most part they were unimpressed by the Bordelais, and for several days the driver of the *fiacre* gave them their only warm welcome. He took off his hat with a tremendous flourish every time he saw them, whether they stopped to patronize him or not. Apparently no one else ever engaged him. Except when they were riding in his *fiacre* he was always at his corner. It cheered them to think there was at least one person who was pleased because they had come to Bordeaux.

During their mild excursions in the *fiacre* Zoe went through the prolonged struggles necessary to get off spot news by wire and made her usual efforts at establishing contacts which gradually

began to bear fruits. An elderly journalist called on them in response to her visit at his office, his sombre black—even to his shirt-studs and the suède gloves which he never removed—proclaiming his widowed state, his long white moustaches lending an air of ferocity to his otherwise benign countenance. He brought a beautiful young granddaughter named Clothilde with him and invited Zoe and Helen to take tea with them on the terrace of the Hôtel Splendide. After that he made several helpful and hospitable gestures, and Zoe was quick to visualize him as the central figure in one of her characteristic sketches. For the third time in his long life he was watching the tragic developments of war between France and Germany, he told her. His father had been killed in 1870, his only son in 1918; now his grandson, the brother of the pretty girl, had already been called to the colours, and he seemed certain he would never see the boy again. But his attitude was curiously calm; it indicated neither agitation nor venom. As long as he did not lose Clothilde, who was all he had left, he would not admit he was bereft. She was doing very well at the University, and he was proud of her. The black-out complicated her studies, but he believed she would still graduate with honours. She wanted a little dog, but he thought it was better she should not have it until her last examination was over. It would divert her, she would stoop to pat it and pause to play with it. He smiled, twirling his long moustaches, and strove to speak severely—

The British consul also called, and also proffered hospitality. The British were surging to the Channel ports instead of southward, and therefore he was not in quite the same distracted situation as his American colleague; moreover, he had been in the city longer and was more at home there. His attitude was correct rather than cordial, for his own major interests, at the moment, lay in the establishment of better relations between England and Spain. But this in itself proved a source of supply to Zoe. Her disappointment over her failure to reach Spain had been bitter, and in the British consul's illuminating conversation, and that of the Spaniards she met at his house, she found some slight compensations. Helen also benefited by the acquaintance, for, from the British consulate, she was also able to telephone Guy from time to time, as official messages were still permitted. The calls took a long time to put through, and the connections were very poor, but they put her in personal touch with him, and the spoken words served to smooth out the strain between them. Of course, she was definitely engaged to him, she assured him repeatedly; she had never been serious about breaking the betrothal. But, apparently, they were now agreed that it was better she should go home. He would find her waiting for him in Washington, whenever he could get there, and then they would be married immediately.

Zoe still regarded Helen's attitude towards Guy as unduly wary,

but she could not quarrel with her about it, especially as she felt that, indirectly, she was partially responsible for it. She tried her best to mitigate the hardships of their surroundings for her sister-in-law, and she was glad when she found Helen was beginning to take a personal interest in their fellow-refugees, who, up to that time, she herself had been inclined to regard more professionally. By then there were two thousand of them in Bordeaux, all of whom periodically besieged the consulate. Some of them were staying at the same hotel as Helen and Zoe, and others patronized the same restaurants. The picturesque Restaurant Basque, shadowy but cosy, on a slit-like street near their hotel, was a favourite meeting-place, and Zoe took to scribbling limericks, by the dim little lights that flickered behind the drawn curtains, for the general amusement of the crowd, while awaiting the arrival of orders. There was nothing remarkable about the limericks, but everyone was seeking an escape from gravity, and Zoe tried to supply it. She wrote on the back of menus and read her verses aloud:

“ There were two gay girls on the go,
Who were bitterly bored by Bordeaux.
When asked why their style
Had been cramped for a while,
They said, ‘ It ain’t us that’s so slow ! ’ ”

“ Bravo, Mrs. Morton! We’ll tell the world there’s nothing slow about you. But when it comes to the consulate—— Couldn’t you write us a limerick about the consulate, too?”

“ Well, I’ll try. Hand over another menu and shove that light a little nearer. Now let me think.”

She chewed her stubby pencil reflectively for a minute, and then began to write with rapidity, the corners of her mouth twisting as she did so. Her fans waited expectantly, and one or two made jocular suggestions. The *garçon*, swooping down with roast duck heaped on a silver platter, was waved away, but began to grin himself when he saw what was happening. The proprietor appeared from a cavernous background. Zoe read to a breathless and receptive audience:

“ The consul is very severe
With vagrants who dare to appear.
So, I think it is better
To just write a letter,
Saying, ‘ Hi, don’t get up on your ear ! ’ ”

Deafening applause greeted this modest masterpiece. There was very little ice unbroken between them all by this time, and Zoe’s limericks served to melt the last of it. She had become a centre of attraction to the refugees, who admired the pluck with which she limped about and the gaiety with which she managed to imbue the atmosphere. In return, she found her new acquaintances a wholly

likable lot. Comparatively few had comfortable quarters; funds were running low in many cases; personal and professional pressure to get home was great in others. But for a long time they all accepted their fate with philosophy. There was a young vaudeville actor who had been doing his act in Rome and who had expected to go on doing it in Berlin; his professional humour was wearing rather thin, but he was still keeping up a good front, in spite of his lean purse and ailing wife. There was a breezy Texan who liked everyone, and whom everyone liked; he insisted that he was enjoying the "Battle of Bordeaux" and was never seen without a broad grin on his well-tanned face. There was a buyer for a New York department store, whose language was occasionally breath-taking, even to Zoe, but whose ready wit and unquenchable high spirits made her another general favourite. There was a doctor who had technically retired, but who went competently around, treating everyone's headaches and hangovers; his wife, a former nurse, who had given up her profession to marry him, made a good old-fashioned mustard plaster in the kitchen of the Restaurant Basque for Zoe when her cough grew worse and the director of the big, barren hotel proved belligerently unco-operative. There was an elderly couple who comforted each other, tenderly and touchingly, and were careful never to let each other see how terribly worried they were, though it was evident to everyone else. There were a mother and daughter who had come abroad in search of culture, and were vaguely aggrieved because they had run into a war instead. There was a railroad magnate whose villa adjoined the Duke of Windsor's at Antibes; his wife was careful to tell Zoe that they themselves did not move "in that fast set," and was afterwards much upset to learn that Zoe knew and liked the Duke of Windsor. There were some school-teachers who had saved for years to take the one great trip of their lives, and some students who had just arrived for their "exchange year" at a foreign university, and who would now have to be shipped straight home again.

At least, Zoe and Helen gathered that theoretically that was the idea. Practically it was quite another matter. For there were no boats to take them, and it was not quite clear how anyone was to get home under these conditions. But at last the word went around that the American Government was going to step in and save the situation. No American citizens were to be left stranded. Army and Navy transports were to be requisitioned for their benefit and convoys furnished if necessary. Then came the definite news that an American commercial steamship line would open a Bordeaux office in the near future, and everyone was immensely cheered.

"In no time at all a stream of ships will be sweeping across the Atlantic," Zoe said to Helen, who still showed signs of needing cheering. "They'll be brilliantly lighted and painted astern and astern with American flags. Mines and submarines will have no

terrors for them. Americans will go home in a fitting manner. Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean!"

She sang the last sentence, and then kept on, singing the whole song. Presently Helen, and the fellow-refugees who were dining with them at the Restaurant Basque, sang also, and they all began to feel hopeful that this was the way it would really be, for again Zoe's gaiety proved contagious. But apparently something slipped. The new steamship offices nominally opened up on a Tuesday. But it was not until Wednesday morning that its officials and staff were installed, and Helen and Zoe were advised to delay until afternoon before they went down to pick up their reservation. That was the expression which the consulate used—"pick up your reservations"; it sounded so casual that it also sounded easy, and they waited, without impatience or anxiety, for afternoon to come. But as they approached the Cour du Maréchal Foch they saw that some kind of a free-for-all fight was apparently taking place. The sidewalk was swarming with people who were shouting loudly and gesticulating frantically. Two sleek French policemen stood nearby, looking on at the fracas with slightly amused expressions on their rubicund faces. They were taking no part in the fray, but it was evident that they were there officially, and that they were authorized to intervene whenever they considered such a step desirable or necessary. At the front door of Number 25, which was slightly raised above the level of the street, stood a stocky man in a chocolate-coloured suit, holding a cane across the entrance. This he occasionally lowered as certain numbers, apparently satisfactory to him, were called out loudly enough to be heard above the clamour of the crowd. From time to time he called out himself.

"No numbers over fifty considered today! All those holding numbers over fifty come back tomorrow! No numbers——"

Zoe and Helen descended from their faithful *fiacre* and forged slowly to the doorway. There they attempted to attract the attention of the barker in the chocolate-coloured suit.

"We haven't a number, but we do have reservations. Will you please let us in so that we can go and pick them up?"

They said this three times, each time a little more loudly than they had the time before and in a manner slightly less ladylike. The crowd that surged around them regarded them with animosity and strove to shove them aside. The man in the chocolate-coloured suit declined to regard them at all. At last they turned away, got into the *fiacre* again, and told the driver to take them to the consulate.

The additional staff had arrived from Strasbourg by this time, somewhat the worse for its hasty evacuation and its flight across France, but nevertheless striving to cope with the situation as best it could. A distracted vice-consul consented to get into the *fiacre* and returned to the steamboat office with Helen and Zoe. Once

there, he said it would be better if he went in alone. He pressed past the man in the chocolate-coloured suit, who recognized him and did not try to stop him, and disappeared from view. At the end of a half-hour, during which the crowd on the sidewalk continued to howl, and Zoe leaned up against a side of the building in an effort to ease her ankle, he returned looking as if he had been through the wars, but carrying a dog-eared slip of paper in one hand.

"This'll let you through," he panted. "No, I'm afraid I can't stay any longer. I've got to rescue some other stranded Americans. Good-bye!"

Once more they plunged into the fray. This time, though not without a battle on their part, the man in the chocolate-coloured suit let them through. The stairway was swarming. They went up it half a step at a time, Zoe wincing with pain as she progressed. Eventually they got to the door of the office, which was on the second story. It required a struggle to wrench this open, because people were packed so close to it. But finally they succeeded—only to discover that they were no nearer victory than they had been before. It was literally impossible for them to wedge their way through the solid mass of humanity to the counter. The ominous words "Closing time" floated through the air. Helen turned to Zoe with a look of desperation.

"It's no use, Zoe. We can't do anything in this mob. Our clothes will be torn off our backs, and you'll get so badly hurt that your ankle will never be well again."

"This isn't any time to give up. I'm not going out of this office now unless I'm taken feet foremost."

Her voice was vibrant with resolution, and it carried. The volunteer who had thought up the little cards for the consulate and who had now transferred his efforts to the steamboat company, for some reason which was not quite clear, caught sight of them. He beckoned to them importantly, opened an invisible gate, and led them into the presence of a black-haired, jerky man, with an angry expression, who sat in a swivel-chair drawn up before an untidy desk, in an inner sanctum.

"This is Señora de Terraza, Senator Morton's daughter," the volunteer said importantly, "and the Senator's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Robert Morton, who writes under the name of Zoe Wing."

"Well, what's your trouble?" barked out the black-haired man.

Speaking politely, they disclaimed any trouble. Still clinging to the phrase that had been proffered them, they said they had come to pick up their reservations.

"Do you mean to say you have reservations?" the black-haired man barked again.

They showed him the dog-eared piece of paper. He rang a bell,

and a dour-faced Scotsman appeared from the outer office and hovered over them.

"Is that your writing?" the black-haired man asked accusingly, pointing to the scrap of paper; and as the Scotsman admitted that it was, the other went on: "Very well. You are lucky. You have a very nice room. The fare is \$268 apiece."

The girls made no objection, feeling that there was none which logically could be made, and that they were indeed very lucky. But Zoe, whose essential frugality was not proof against even such a situation as this, mentioned that they held round-trip tickets on the French Line, which she had understood would be honoured.

"Did you buy them in New York or in Paris?" the black-haired man went on barking.

"In Washington."

"All right. We are not taking anything but dollars, but you can go down to the office of the French Line on Cours Xavier Arnozan and get a refund on those tickets of yours—in dollars, mind—and we'll apply them to the cost of your passage with us—as far as it will go."

The tone of his voice was contemptuous. It acted as a goad to Zoe's already jangled nerves. Helen recognized the mounting irritation in her sister-in-law's controlled voice, though the black-haired man did not.

"After all, the tickets we have call for two rooms and a bath. Now we're going to have only one cabin between us. Besides, we understood that another woman was to have the Pullman—a friend of one of the secretaries at the American Embassy."

"Another woman! Four other women! Two in beds, one in an upper berth and three in cots. You get one bed and one cot."

"You are charging \$268 for a cot? In a room with five other women?"

"But you have a private bath!"

"Is a bath private if you share it with four strangers?"

He lashed out at her. "A hundred women will be using the same bath in another part of the ship. They're paying \$210—our minimum rate in the cabin class—for cots in the palm-room and the swimming-pool. The rate for the cabin you have is \$268 apiece. You wouldn't expect us to go under our regular rates, would you?"

"But \$268 apiece is the charge when there are two persons occupying the cabin in question, not six, and \$210 is the minimum rate in a stateroom and not for a cot in the swimming-pool."

"Not in times like this! We've got cots everywhere. Instructions from Washington. The State Department has told us to crowd all the people we can on this boat."

"At \$210 a cot?"

"Oh, you can get a cot in the tourist class or the third for the

minimum rate if you want to. We're lining them up all through the public rooms. Do you want something cheap?"

"No, I don't want anything cheap. But I want to get what I'm paying for."

Helen looked at Zoe curiously, wondering if she would be able to convince the black-haired man that the question was not of money but of fairness. Neither of them was short of funds. Helen had about \$5,000 in cash on her person, besides her letter of credit, and she was sure that Zoe had nearly as much. But she understood and shared Zoe's point of view. They both possessed the characteristic, more or less typically American, of objecting to paying for something they did not get, and they were both familiar with the plan of the boat in question, including the cabin for two now being offered for six. Suddenly it seemed spread out before their startled eyes in its inadequate entirety. Suppose there were a fire, or a panic, on a ship carrying double its normal number of passengers? The prospect was not a pretty one, as Zoe already knew from previous experiences. Moreover, a storm, and not a severe one at that, would set all those cots rolling around. Even the frayed tempers and overwrought nerves of great numbers of strangers herded together under trying conditions, short of sleep, debarred from privacy, deprived of exercise, could create a situation that might be very serious. Both were mindful of the cables they had sent, saying they were already in Bordeaux and promising to take the first "feasible" opportunity to come home. But the more they thought about it the less "feasible" this seemed. They spoke almost simultaneously.

"We'd like to think it over."

The black-haired man fairly sprang at them. Apparently such a course as that had never occurred to him. He spat out his next words.

"There's nothing else you can take!"

They knew that he might be speaking the truth. They still had their French tickets, and though the black-haired man scornfully went on to say that these were "not worth the paper they're printed on," Zoe and Helen did not think it was as bad as that. They believed that the tickets represented a refund—in any kind of currency they desired—or some sort of passage eventually. But they were not sure of anything else, and they had been in Bordeaux for two dreary weeks already. Yet somehow neither of them felt for one moment that she had done the wrong thing, and each tried to hide her discouragement from the other.

As the evening progressed they felt increasingly that they had done the right thing. The other Americans they met at the Restaurant Basque began to talk about their experiences. People had been forced to form three long lines for cabin, tourist and third class, over the protest of many that they were willing to go in any

class, as long as they could go. One woman had stood in line for thirty-nine hours and had finally secured a cot in a third-class lounge. On the other hand, an American official and his wife and son had experienced no difficulty in securing a ticket which read, "All of cabin," and a famous musician and his wife had been equally fortunate. The examples of unfairness were apparently endless. As the meal progressed, and the talk grew louder and more indignant, Zoe drew a menu towards her, turned it over, and began to scribble with her stubby pencil.

"Another limerick, Zoe? That's right, give it to them hot and heavy this time!"

They all called her Zoe now. They crowded around her, the tenseness of the moment slackening.

"It isn't very hot and heavy. But here you are :

" The benevolent boys of our Line
Decided that it would be fine
To clear up a lot,
At two-ten a cot—
They may get your cash but not mine!"

She did not join in the laugh that rewarded her endeavour. Instead, she rose and began to speak, the gathering growing more and more hushed as she went on.

"I'm afraid I don't think it's very funny. Here we are, Americans, in a foreign country that is at war, and we counted on an American line to take us home in safety, at a fair price. We were willing to put up with some hardships if it were necessary. I've done it myself many times and I'm sure almost all of you have. I'm willing to do it again, and I'm sure all the rest of you are. But this wasn't a question of being a good sport, under difficult conditions, with everyone trying to help out. It was a question of making clear that you would pay anything, in dollars. My sister-in-law and I didn't do that, so we seem to be out of luck. Perhaps if we had we could have had a private cabin, with a bath, like this musician and this official you've been talking about. But then somebody else would have suffered for it, so I'm glad in a way we didn't get it. This isn't a patriotic service; it's a strictly commercial proposition. American citizens aren't being rescued from a belligerent country because they themselves belong to one that's strong and proud. The students, the school teachers, the vaudeville actors, the timid souls, can stay on here for ever, as far as that Line is concerned. Unless they can pay for their safety and escape in dollars. Dollars, *dollars*, DOLLARS! Francs are no good any more. Distress doesn't matter, or fear, or want. Just dollars. Shall we drink to dollars?"

No one responded to her bitter toast. There were a few murmurs of "Hear! hear!" some scattered applause, some heartfelt congratulations. Then, gradually, the groups separated and drifted

away. Helen had never seen Zoe so upset, and in a way this feeling seemed strange to her, for she knew that Zoe had plenty of dollars and that she was neither afraid nor distressed. But vaguely she understood that Zoe felt she had lost something which she had always believed her country would assure her, and that nothing could make up to her for this. For the first time she became the would-be comforter, speaking to her sister-in-law soothingly and with great compassion. But neither slept very much, in their courtyard room over the kitchen, and they did not feel very cheerful the next morning.

Then, in the midst of the gloom and the blankness, the telephone rang, and they were summoned to the offices of the French Line on the Cours Xavier Arnozan. The director called them into his private office, and told them, in slow and careful English, that he had good news for them.

"We have just a small cargo here—a freight-air you call it. But it will leave tonight, and I can give you a cabin—yes, for just you two, of course." He paused, his pleasant face, which had looked rather troubled, slowly brightening. "*Le Commandant est très gentil*," he said, lapsing momentarily into French. "The Captain is one ver' nice man. We will do the best we can for you, the very best. What do you decide, mesdames?"

They decided to go. That evening, with a dozen other American refugees, a Czech with an Argentinian wife, two middle-aged spinsters with a dog, a young Austrian Jewess who was all alone, a Mexican who cultivated a resemblance to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and a Greek who resembled no one in particular, they embarked at Bordeaux on the freighter *San Pedro*, for a destination vaguely designated as the North American continent.

Their cabin was better than either of them had expected. Besides the two berths it contained a narrow settee covered with brown velvet, an armchair, a chest of drawers, a wardrobe with a long mirror, and a washstand with cold running water. Its greatest disadvantage appeared to be its distance from any sort of plumbing, except this basin. Investigation revealed that the deck where they were contained the quarters of the "ver' nice captain"—as yet undiscovered—situated between their cabin and another one like it, and nothing else. At the bottom of a flight of very dark, very steep steps was a deck where there were four more cabins and the community bathroom which bore on its inner door the inscription, *Prière de faire fonctionner la chasse d'eau assez longtemps pour assurer la propriété de la cuvette*, which had been translated very freely into English, beneath: "Leave this chamber just a little better than you found it." There were certain signs that this injunction had not always been heeded. On the deck below were the officers' quarters, a tiny galley, and a small salon which served

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as dining-room, smoking-room and lounge. Two tables, equipped with swivel-chairs and seating eight people each, ran across it sideways between a buffet and a settee, covered, like the one in their cabin, with brown velvet. The walls were panelled in golden oak. The portholes, painted dark blue, were all screwed down tight. A steward was engaged in setting out bottles of mustard and *vin ordinaire*, in preparation for the evening meal.

They returned to their cabin, finished their unpacking, and reassured an anxious sailor who was making the rounds to be sure that all the painted portholes were tightly screwed down and covered with curtains as well. They had been in Bordeaux two weeks, they told him, they knew the regulations. At the thought that within a few minutes they would be leaving Bordeaux, their spirits rose. They washed in cold water and went down to dinner.

It was not until long afterwards that they discovered they had both had the same feeling as they seated themselves at table; that they had suddenly stumbled into the *mise-en-scène* of another "Outward Bound," not a stage version of a last journey, but a real one. Everything combined to contribute to this feeling. They were on a ship belonging to a belligerent nation, which they had taken in a spirit of mingled bravado and gratitude, because it offered them immediate departure and decent accommodations at a fair price, when they could secure none of these on an American ship. They had not hesitated to take the freighter, but now that they were on it, sober second thought compelled them to face the fact that they were about to cross waters strewn with mines and spotted with submarines, and that the result might be extremely unpleasant, to say the least. Neither of them gave tongue to this thought, and, left to themselves, they might have risen above it. The presence and the behaviour of their table-mates made this impossible.

The two English ladies were seated on one side of them. One was pretty and feminine, with soft grey curls, pink cheeks, and wide, childlike eyes. The other was plain, masculine and protective; she was heavily built and clad in serviceable sports clothes. They talked to each other in undertones, calling each other dear and darling, but they did not speak spontaneously to anyone else at first, though they answered courteously when addressed. They were perfectly self-controlled, but their presence on such a ship, at such a time, seemed mysterious.

The Czech, the Argentinian and the Austrian, on the other side of them, were not controlled at all, and fear, as far as they were concerned, had mounted to hysterical heights. The young Austrian, who was lovely-looking and lonely, kept making little moaning sounds, and giving vent to soft, desperate exclamations, addressed to no one in particular. She was terribly pale, and she clutched frantically at a large zipper-bag, as if she expected someone to wrest it from her at any moment. The husband and wife were convinced

that the ship would be torpedoed before the night was over. They said this so often, addressing everyone else at the table in a variety of languages, that it was all Helen and Zoe could do to keep from asking them why they had bothered to come aboard, if they felt their fate was so certain and so near. Resolutely they refrained, and attacked the food that was set before them.

It was excellent food, but it was ear-marked by unmistakable signs that the general nervousness pervaded the galley no less than elsewhere. The courses arrived in higgledy-piggledy fashion, some of them with no change of plate between, others with no accompanying forks and knives, and all of them at such lightning speed that it was not possible to swallow much of anything before it was snatched away. In the middle of this crazy service the steward paused with a plate he had just caught up still in mid-air, and told Zoe and Helen he knew just how to please them, that he had waited on them before, on the *Ile de France*, where, as they well knew, everything was perfectly done. It seemed like the final touch to a fantastic vision.

"*André, Madame a besoin d'un cendrier,*" said a pleasant voice out of nowhere.

They turned in their swivel-chairs to see whence the voice came. At the further table, which had been empty when they entered the salon, beside another refugee American—a mining engineer on his way back from Cyprus, shrewd, grey and disillusioned—sat a man with a lean, brown face, an aquiline nose, and thin sensitive lips. The slight sharpness of the general effect which these gave was offset by a twinkle, apparently irrepressible, in the keen eyes, and a whimsical smile which appeared unexpectedly. He was smoking a stub of a cigarette tucked into the corner of his mouth, and he sat with his elbows on the table, slightly slouched forward, an attitude which was inexplicably graceful. He was dressed in a rather stained and shabby uniform, with four gold stripes on the sleeves and the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour in the buttonhole.

"The ver' nice Captain," Zoe said to Helen in an undertone. "I imagine it won't take us long to find out whether he comes up to the Director's description."

It was the next day at luncheon when they decided that he did. The Czech, the Argentinian and the Austrian began to question him. The interval had admittedly been trying. They had pulled out from Bordeaux about nine in the evening, hours later than the announced departure. Then they had gone jogging down the river so slowly that the engines creaked and groaned and the ship shook as though it had the palsy. Frequently it stopped altogether. When morning came, they saw that they were not heading out to sea, but creeping cautiously along the coast of France in a northerly direction, getting further from New York every minute. This was too much for the self-control of the three refugees. As the Captain

slipped into his seat, as unobtrusively as he had the evening before, a barrage of questions was fired across the dining-room.

"Do tell us, Captain. What route are we taking? We can't understand why——"

"Route? W'at route are we tayking?" The Captain's face assumed a blank expression, as if he had never heard of such a thing as a route. "Ah don' know," he said pleasantly but vaguely. "Ah don't get my orders yet. Ah don' know w'ere we're going."

"But are we going north instead of west to avoid submarines? Is there less danger of submarines this way?"

"Submarines?" inquired the Captain. "W'at you say, submarines? W'at makes you think there might be submarines? Did you ever see wan? No! Did you ever hear wan? No! *Eh bien!* Legends, that w'at they must be. Anyway, Ah don' know anything about them."

He produced a funny little nickel-plated gadget from his pocket and began to roll himself a fresh cigarette. "All Ah know is," he said, in a slightly plaintive voice, "yesterday morning, nine o'clock, the General Passengair Ay-gent, he send for me, he ask me if Ah could take five, six passengairs to New York. We nevair take passengairs to New York, this is a freight-air. But, naturally, Ah say yes, if he want, we manage five, six. Two o'clock, he send for me again; he say, could Ah manage twelve passengairs. *Que voulez-vous?* Ah say yes again. Finally, dinnair time, Ah find we 'ave nineteen passengers on the poor *San Pedro*. How Ah goin' to think about a route, about submarines, about such things like that? Ah got to look after nineteen passengairs!"

Somebody had certainly looked after them very efficiently, Zoe decided; and when she caught the Captain testing the taps in the community bathroom, which had declined to turn, and unobtrusively doing various other odd jobs of like nature, she concluded that he did indeed have a finger in every problematical pie. And his discipline was excellent. Lifeboat drill took place immediately after luncheon on the first day out, and it was by no means perfunctory. The Mate, who supervised it, adjusted the lifebelts individually to make sure that they fitted. He also gave detailed instructions concerning the small bags to be kept ready, packed with bare necessities, by all berths; but to this rather grim reminder of what might happen at any moment, was coupled the reassuring knowledge that the lifeboats had enough space for three times the number of persons aboard the ship, and that all were so readily accessible as to be reached within one minute.

The drill was hardly over when the *San Pedro*, which had not been going more than six or seven knots an hour at any time, groaned, creaked, and came to a stop off Belle Ile. By dinner-time it was apparent that it was going no further that night. The barrage of questions began again.

"This is a ver' nice 'arbor," the Captain said cheerfully, "ver' shallow. If there should be a submarine—you said you believed in submarines, *non?*—the *San Pedro* couldn't sink. She is right on the bottom, anyway. You can all 'ave a nice long sleep. So can Ah. *Bon repos, Mesdames, Messieurs.*"

His assurances did not have the desired effect upon the Austrian, the Argentinian and the Czech. With one accord they exclaimed that they would not be able to close their eyes. The word submarine had sent them into fresh frenzy. The Argentinian was especially vehement.

"What is the use in talking to us like that?" she exclaimed. "We all know that we shall never reach New York alive. Well, then, we all know that probably we shall not. Oh, when I think of all that I have left behind me! My charming apartment! My two cats!"

"Why did you leave them?" Zoe asked rudely.

"But Paris was about to be destroyed!" she cried still more vehemently. "No, it is true that it had not been injured when we left, but at any moment bombs might begin to fall! We fled to Havre and there an *alerte* took place almost every night. So then we fled to Bordeaux. But who could know how long that would be safe? So next we took this boat. We thought we would be out of the danger zone by this time. And instead of that we seem to be staying in it indefinitely!"

Her attitude was not calculated to make good digestion wait on appetite. But her husband was definitely worse. He was not only afraid of the perils of war, he was afraid of everything. He crept about, from deck to deck, peering into cabins and corners, in search of lurking dangers. He twitched all over, and Zoë and Helen had to keep constantly drawing away because, quite unconsciously, he kept kicking them. His bulging eyes rolled constantly from one end of the room to the other looking for more trouble and finally came to rest on their faces. Gradually they got used to all this, but that evening when the *San Pedro* lay off Belle Ile, they looked at each other covertly but desperately, signalling that they should never be able to stand it.

"Ah don't 'ave to get that good sleep just yet," the Captain said suddenly behind them. It was as if he had divined everything that was passing in their minds—the disgust, the captured feeling, the sudden longing for congenial friends around a festive board of their own. "Shall we make wan small bridge? We are in this nice shallow 'arbour, we might 'ave a little game. At sea, all lights out in the dining-room at ten o'clock. Bettair we play while we can."

They settled down at the end of one of the long tables, which by this time had been cleared of their yellow linen table-cloths and ringed napkins, their carafes and mustard, and were covered with brown felt. The mining engineer had brought some cards and an

old score pad with him. He produced these, thawing visibly, and it was soon evident that he played beautiful bridge. By and by a young officer came in quietly and handed the Captain two sheets of paper. He waited until he was dummy, then he glanced at them. "Half-past six," he said to the young officer, in a pleasant undertone. Afterwards he rolled a fresh cigarette, picked up his newly dealt cards, and regarded them critically. "Ah bid three no trumps," he said. Then he glanced around him as if to find anyone to challenge his bid. No one did, and he played the hand and made it.

Zoe and Helen wakened next morning to a rocking ocean, and knew then what half-past six had meant. But when they got out on deck they discovered that they were still headed north instead of west, and still hugging the coast of France. By mid-afternoon the boat had come to a stop again, this time in the beautiful harbour of Brest. Everyone was asked to hand in passports, and to fill out elaborate forms setting forth life history, past, present and future. These forms were hardly finished when a little boat shot out from the shore, and the Captain, in civvies, stepped into it and chugged away. He was gone for a long time, and when he came back he looked tired but triumphant. During dinner, as he parried the usual questions in the usual way he studied the young Austrian, as if he were concerned about her. She had been having a sty on her eye, which he had persuaded her to let him lance and dress; but that was better, so there was no occasion to be worried about it any more. When the passengers, with the exception of Helen, Zoe and the mining engineer, had left the dining-room, and another "small bridge" had begun, the Captain disclosed what the trouble was.

"That poor little girl," he said in a tender tone of voice. It was evident that he felt responsible for her, that she had become a member of his family, bound by the powerful ties of maritime relationship. "She has a German passport. *Eh bien*, how would she have anything else then? W'at can an Austrian do? The port authorities were agitated, they did not wish that she should sail. And her French visa good only for five days more! W'at would have happened to her if Ah had put her off here? *Non, non*, that does not do itself. She has waited a year to go to America. Now the *San Pedro* will take her."

He rolled his cigarette, picked up his cards, and glared at them.

"Three no trumps," he announced.

The second bridge game was not so quiet as the first. The Czech, who had retired for the night—or so it was supposed—apparently smelled it out. He returned to the dining-room to tell everybody else what was wrong with the way it was being played. This occupied him, to his satisfaction if to no one else's, for some time. Then he remembered the submarines again.

"I suppose there are a good many around Brest, huh?" he said. "I suppose there are more here than anywhere else, aren't there, Captain?"

"Except in the Channel!" exclaimed his wife, who had rejoined him by that time. "I am sure we shall never live to get through the Channel! Don't you think the Channel is almost certain to be fatal, Captain?"

"Ah don't know," said the Captain, shuffling his cards. "Ah don't know anything about it. Three no——"

"No doubt we shall be starting for the Channel at any moment now," chimed in the Czech. "We shall be leaving Brest during the night, shan't we, Captain? I must start to bed so that I shall already be undressed before it begins to get rough. I am such a very bad sailor. I suffer terribly. I think I had better say good-night."

No one urged him to remain, but in spite of the Czech's suggestion they did not leave Brest that night. They stayed anchored there, through the bright moonlight which constitutes perfect submarine weather, and the mellow radiance of the gorgeous fall day that followed. The ships surrounding them on every side rode proudly and easily on the waves. And yet there was something sinister, something mysterious, about all this beauty, as if hidden danger were coiled around it like a great poisonous serpent ready to strike at any moment. Zoe, trying not to look beyond the loveliness she saw to the menace she could not see, stayed in her cabin and wrote intensively until late afternoon. Then, at last, she went out and joined Helen on the tiny deck for a breath of air.

She was just in time. A sudden stir, a sudden excitement, pervaded the motionless ship. Then, through the silence, came the first faint throb of the engines. As they slid slowly from their moorings they saw that all around them other ships were doing the same. One—two—three—four—five—six ships, skimming over the blue water, pointing straight towards the setting sun, which poured out its splendour far and wide, making a golden path across an azure sea.

"We're all going out together! We'll be safe after all!"

It was Helen who spoke. But, looking at each other, she and Zoe knew that she had voiced the words that Zoe had purposely left unsaid. They stood in the bow watching the glorious sight, feeling secure, feeling uplifted. The great poisonous serpent had uncoiled itself and slipped away, far from that shining streak.

Then something happened again. They saw that the other ships, one by one, seemed to be turning to the left, while they seemed to be turning to the right. At first they told each other that they were just getting into position. Then they pretended not to see what had really happened.

The other ships had gone south, to Bordeaux, whence they had so lately and so longingly come. They were headed for the Channel, all alone.

Strangely enough, they both slept soundly that night. Perhaps this was because they were exhausted by danger, even though they were not frightened by it. When they woke up the ship had stopped again, and there was a sound of voices coming from the Captain's quarters—English voices, courteous but cold.

The port officials of Plymouth had come aboard the ship and were asking searching questions of the Czech, the Argentinian and the Austrian. It was obvious that they intended to be satisfied that these aliens should be allowed to proceed to the United States. Zoe and Helen could not hear the words, only the tones. The little Austrian's were shaking. She was a Jewess, she had waited and waited for her escape from bondage to freedom; and now, on a technicality, she might be sent back to the doom of the German yoke. The Czech was strident and argumentative. "You fool, you fool," they said to themselves, lying very still in their berths; "if you aren't careful you'll get sent back to your charming apartment and the bombs which might be falling over Paris any day now. That doesn't matter so much, but if you act this way it might end in having all aliens sent ashore. Do give that poor little girl a chance, a fighting chance, for life, liberty and pursuit of happiness"—

It was the Captain's voice they heard next, suave and hospitable. There was a clink of glasses, a short laugh, a pleasant murmur; the moment of tension had passed. It almost seemed as if a sigh were wafted through the ship. Presently the English officials went away, agreeable, satisfied. The Captain went with them. A little boat had come chugging out from shore as it had at Brest. But before he left he had gone around to each stateroom, knocked, and asked if anyone would like to have some errands done ashore. He would be glad to undertake small commissions—cigarettes, candy, writing-paper, out-going mail. There had also been a slight *contretemps* about port rulings after the matter of the aliens had been satisfactorily adjusted. The British regulations were very comprehensive when it came to a question of listing the personnel and passengers of a ship, even if this were only temporarily in one of England's harbours. "Eight pages!" the Captain exclaimed, in telling them afterwards of his predicament. He produced the formidable document which the Mate had filled out, and, turning the sheets, pointed to a section marked with a cross. "Now w'at you think of that? Animals—dogs, cats, we must say how manny we 'ave of ever'thing. Ah 'ave told the port authorities we 'ave three cats, Ah suppose that is all. Ah don' know anything about any thing. One of these cats, she just 'as three kittens. My *Seconde* 'as written in six cats on this papair. The British officair finds the

item about the kittens Ah didn't declare! *Mon Dieu! Que voulez-vous?"*

They expressed their sympathy to the Captain because there had been no Walter Winchell on board to tell him beforehand about this blessed event and because of the complications that this lack of information had caused. But they did not dwell on the matter very long because their attention had been diverted in another direction. A very heated political discussion had been taking place on the side. The Mate, having finished his own meal, had assumed an attitude in front of the sideboard, and with gestures so excited that he seemed in danger of bursting off all his buttons had begun to declaim. The mining engineer, the chief engineer of the ship and the Czech had all chimed in. Only the Captain had sat on the sidelines, rolling interminable cigarettes out of his little nickel-plated machine and smiling his whimsical smile. When at last the Mate had cooled down and disappeared, together with most of the passengers, the Captain continued to sit in his swivel-chair, leaning over the table, making pleasant, inconsequential remarks, and folding the menus into fanciful shapes, which eventually took the form of *petites marmites* and flying ducks. At last, with the apologetic air of a host who feels that he has been slightly remiss, he asked if Zoe and Helen would not like a nightcap. As André, the pseudo-stylish steward from the *Ile de France*, set the ingredients for this down before him and he began to pour them out, they noticed that his hand shook, ever so slightly. It was at this moment—for the shaking lasted only a moment—that they felt sure they were leaving Plymouth during the night and that this time they would be headed out to sea.

They were not mistaken. Again, miraculously, they had gone soundly to sleep. But they were awakened by a tremendous clatter outside their door, which, according to "orders," they had left open every night. Heavy footsteps were coming up the stairs, and a hearty British voice rang forth, "Has the Captain gone out?" It did not seem likely, under all the circumstances, that he could or would have gone out, and soon there were other sounds which indicated that he had not. After that Zoe and Helen waited breathlessly for the throb of the engines. It was not long in coming. They got up and looked at the little clock with the radium dial, which they were careful to keep turned away from the blue-painted, curtained window, for even a dial like this could be seen a long way off. It was just half-past two, and they were "Outward Bound." They went back to bed and fell asleep again.

There had been rumours about a convoy, just as there had been rumours about many other things—those strange whisperings of war-time that come from nowhere but which are not so easy to waft away again into space. This report, as it proved, had been made of more substantial stuff than most. When they unscrewed

their porthole, to let in the welcome morning air—after the breathless stuffiness of the night which was one of their greatest trials—they could see, framed by its circle, another freighter, bobbing up and down close behind them; when they got out on deck the sky and the ocean both seemed alive. Overhead two aeroplanes were swooping, and around a covey of vessels two destroyers were frisking, lightly turning up foam as they wove their way in and out of the waves, as playfully as if their purpose had been that of pure sport. One of the ships had an old-fashioned paddle-wheel at the back. Another, trailing its lifeboat after it, was so small that it seemed incredible that it could keep up with the others. But it did. It was bound for St. Pierre and Miquelin, the two small islands off the Banks of Newfoundland, which neither time nor tide had been able to wrest from France. It was, of course, French, like their own “freight-air”; all the others were English, and an English transport rode ahead of them. Towards sunset, the orange and crimson sails of a dozen Breton fishing smacks came into view—brave little boats, venturing far out into the ocean. Both their colour and their courage seemed a fitting complement for the convoy. They made a fair picture seem fairer, and a brave one the braver, until the convoy left them behind.

But it was late that night when they saw the fairest picture of all. Cautiously switching out the last light, the Captain opened the door leading from his quarters to the deck and motioned to them to step out there. The sea was as smooth as glass; and over it, all around them, the still dark shapes of ships were silently gliding forward. Not a sound came from any one, not a beam or beacon of any kind was visible. But overhead the moon, encircled by flashing stars, hung like a silver lamp. Transparent clouds, floating softly away, carried some of its radiance with them. The ocean was radiant too; only at the horizon did its luminance merge with the darkness. The silent shapes looked all the blacker against it—giant coffins set down in celestial silver.

“You nevair saw anything like that before, Mesdames,” the Captain said at their shoulders. “Ah hope you nevair will again. Beautiful, is it not so, as you look at it this way? But that, Mesdames, is war.”

The convoy stayed with their boat three nights and two days, finally slipping away from it, as it had joined it, under cover of darkness. Presumably it was out of the danger zone by this time, and so were the other vessels. The destroyers frisked about there no longer; their gambols were reserved for ships coming from the other direction. The aeroplanes had gone hurrying back to their bases. The Breton fishing-smacks, brave as they were, could not venture this far out. The “freight-air” was alone again, and the Captain made this solitude seem important. “With the convoy we

go only seven, eight knots an hour," he said. "Now we go twelve, fourteen. We go'n' to hurry up, we go'n' to be the first French boat to make this crossing since the war. The *Normandie* and the *Ile de France*, they are both tied up at the dock in New York. Ah don' know where are the *De Grasse* and the *Champlain*. Anyway, the *San Pedro* is the flagship now!"

"It's true, you know," Zoe said to Helen. "Don't you feel a thrill of pride in having had a small part in the *San Pedro's* adventure? You know that Magellan's mandate was when he was the first to circumnavigate the globe—'Follow the flagship and ask no questions!' We've had a more exciting experience in a way than his companions. We haven't been following the flagship. We are actually on it. We ought to be contented without asking questions."

They were content. Indeed, they were presently more aware of contentment than of any other sensation. ("No one can remain in a state of tension indefinitely, I suppose, any more than anyone can grieve twice with equal intensity for the same kind of a loss," Helen said to Zoe, philosophizing in her turn.) They settled down to a serene existence. Some people got seasick and some people caught cold. The Czech belonged to the former category. He retired to his stateroom in anguish, which no one else shared. André, the pseudo-stylish steward, belonged to the latter category. For a day or two he battled bravely against his symptoms. Then, apparently, he decided to resort to well-known remedies which are more efficacious and less objectionable when their beneficiary does not try to move around too much. It was evident to Zoe and Helen that all was not well with André when they entered the dining-room for dinner. He passed them the soup, although he had provided no plates to put this in. By the time the roast arrived there were plates, but André balanced the platter containing lamb drenched in gravy as if he were doing a juggling act. Helen gently called his attention to the liquid dripping down her dress.

"*Cela n'a pas d'importance*," he said airily, staggering forward again. Nothing seemed important to him by that time. He was in a very playful mood. He quoted proverbs, burst into snatches of songs, and tossed the oranges which comprised the final course first to one passenger then to another. The more extraordinary his antics became the more a frozen silence enshrouded the dining-room, broken only by hysterical giggles from the little Austrian. But when André, whose breath by that time not even a Roquefort cheese could smother, finally slithered out of sight, the Captain gave a deep and audible sigh.

"W'at am Ah goin' to do? *D'abord les sousmarins, puis les passagers, et maintenant le garçon!* First Ah got to look out for submarines. Everyone keeps tellin' me so. Then Ah got to look

out for nineteen passengers. The General Passenger Agent, he tells me that. Now Ah got to look after the steward. Ah don' need anyone to tell me that. W'at am Ah goin' to do? Everythin' goin' from bad to worse."

The supercharged atmosphere cleared suddenly. Someone gave a wholly natural laugh, and then everybody began to talk at once, describing the special antic of André's which, in his or her opinion, seemed most arresting. It was late before the "little bridge" began. This now took place in the Captain's quarters, as the pseudo-Douglas Fairbanks, and the kindred spirits who had become his cronies, overran the dining-room in the evening, while the Czech cowered in his berth, and the two English ladies explained that they preferred to spend their evenings alone in their cabin. It was a welcome diversion after the long days, during which Zoe resolutely wrote, having observed the evil effects, mental and physical, of idleness on all the rest of the passengers, except Helen, whose apparent calm was still unruffled. Usually the rubber ended near eleven. This time, however, it was close and exciting, so they went on playing. They were in the middle of one of the Captain's three no trumps when a dull, sickening thud, followed by screams, caused them to spring up with one accord and make for the deck below.

The lady whose son had decided that it would be best for her to take this boat, while he remained behind in Bordeaux, had fallen out of her berth, the upper one, over the little Austrian. No one knew exactly how it had happened, since the upper berth had railings and the sea was perfectly calm. Possibly the ladder had slipped when she was on it, though there was no way of determining this. But the fact remained that she was prostrate on the floor, and it was evident that she was in considerable pain, besides being terribly frightened. Someone had arnica, someone else had a bandage, someone else had a sedative. By slow degrees her most immediate needs all received attention, she was hoisted back into bed, and everyone else dispersed.

Not, however, for long. Zoe and Helen had hardly settled down in their own cabin when they began to smell smoke. They both tried to pretend it was imagination, but the actuality proved too strong for them. They arose, put on dark silk house-coats, and knocked respectfully at the door of the Captain's quarters.

"*Pardon, Commandant.* We are very sorry to disturb you. But we are quite sure we smell smoke."

The Captain was still up, for he and the Mate both kept twelve-hour watches, declining to let the younger officers take the responsibility for these alone. He gave a startled exclamation and dived down the stairs, followed by the passengers, whose number increased every minute, and whose toilets were extremely sketchy. The further down they went the thicker the smoke became. When

they reached the Mate's quarters they found it was pouring out of his door. He had a bad attack of asthma and was burning a smudge to assuage this, sleeping peacefully meanwhile.

It was about three when Zoe and Helen got back to bed for the second time. At six, André, who had never been known to do anything of the sort before, switched on the light outside their cabin, and began to sweep the two shabby little hemp mats that lay there with a large old-fashioned broom. The dust and the din which arose therefrom were unbelievably great. They rose once again and confronted him in their wrath. After that they were too wide awake to go back to sleep again. Zoe went to her typewriter and Helen to her deckchair.

Storm and discomfort settled down over the "freight-air," then suddenly both were dissipated, for beautiful, balmy weather announced its entrance into the Gulf Stream, though the Captain still looked blank when anybody spoke to him about a route. ("Ah don' know. Ah don' know anything. Panama, maybe. Maybe Martinique. Ah saw some seaweed.") Then came the unmistakable fog and wind of the Banks and a light which unofficially proclaimed Nantucket. The Captain made a casual suggestion. "Maybe you like to send some little message home? We are in territorial waters now. You write them out, Ah okay them for the T.S.F."

"Some little messages home!" There was a sudden lump in Zoe's throat, a sudden mist before her eyes; looking at Helen with blurred vision she saw that her sister-in-law was not even trying to hide her happy tears. For seventeen days not a single wireless had been sent out from the ship because of the ease with which a submarine could compute the position of one from these. They had not even been allowed beforehand to say what boat they were taking. They knew that by this time Bob and Guy and Senator and Mrs. Morton must be almost frantic with fear. They typed out their "little messages" with thankful hearts and then they dressed for the Captain's dinner.

It was a very gala occasion. Everyone met in his quarters for cocktails, even the English ladies, who emerged from seclusion, and the Czech who forgot to be seasick. As the drinks circulated the Captain drew from a drawer the map showing the positions of the submarines that had been sighted during the voyage, and the pink slips bearing the little messages regarding these—for wireless had been received though not transmitted. Zoe saw now that there had been a submarine at the very entrance to the harbour by Belle Ile—so that was why they had run in there, not because the water was "so nice and shallow." Of course there were a flock of them in the Channel—that was to be expected. But the last one, the one from which they had been only thirty metres away, two days before they

reached territorial waters—well, that did not seem quite so logical. The Czech shivered as he drained the second cocktail.

But the submarines were behind them now as well as the voyage. They went down to dinner in the best of spirits. And it was a very good dinner indeed—consommé, mushroom patties, asparagus, roast chicken, green salad, *gâteau San Pedro*, assorted cheeses, assorted fruits: chablis, burgundy and champagne. Everyone complimented the Captain. He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Que voulez-vous?* The *San Pedro* is the flagship now, we shall not call her a freight-air any more, we shall call her a luxury line-air. Has she not taken you on a splendid cruise, showing you all sorts of beautiful harbours? *Mai oui, nous avons faite le tourisme.* Now we must celebrate. *A votre santé, Mesdames, Messieurs!*"

They drank their toasts standing, but it was to him, not to themselves. He smiled his little whimsical smile and turned away. However, they knew that he was pleased, pleased and very touched. He did not joke for once. He did not say anything at all for a few minutes, and though they had all been so gay a little while before, they were moved, too deeply moved to say much either. A hush descended over the little *salon*, and each of them knew that the other was thinking of all they had been through—and of all they had escaped. Then the Captain got slowly to his feet.

"*Voyons,*" he said huskily, "*voyons.* We must have one more small bridge before we say good-bye."

Late than night when Zoe and Helen were packing, Zoe emptied the contents of her briefcase on her berth. She had kept this equipped for the emergency against which they had been told to provide, and into it every evening she had placed one copy of what she had written during the day, entrusting a carbon to Helen for similar safekeeping. Several times, in accepting these carbons, Helen had made a remark which had caused Zoe some secret amusement, though she had never given tongue to it.

"If—if anything should happen, Zoe, I'll be sure to give this to Bob. I'll tell him you went on working right up to the very end. It's been wonderful, the way you've worked. I don't see how you've done it. I believe these will be the very best articles you've ever written, too. And I'm sure Bob's going to feel the same way about them."

There seemed to be no lurking fear in Helen's mind that if disaster did overtake them, it might strike at her and spare Zoe. Up to this moment Zoe had forborne from reminding her of this. But now that it was possible to jest again she did so.

"I certainly appreciate your thoughtfulness in saying you'd see the stories got to Bob whatever happened," she said whimsically. "But it's beginning to look as if I'd be able to hand them over to him myself. Would you like to get rid of those carbons? They

must clutter up your dressing-bag terribly. What else did you put in there, by the way?"

Helen opened her own bag and handed Zoe the carbons. Its content, aside from these, were a carton of cigarettes and a pink satin nightgown trimmed with écru lace.

The *San Pedro* steamed into New York harbour at noon the next day. There were mists early in the morning, but these gradually melted away. As they slipped slowly up the Hudson River they saw all their surroundings gilded by the bright autumnal sun—the tall buildings, the fussy ferry boats, the endless docks, the multitudes that peopled them. The little Austrian stood gazing out at them with a transfigured face. Looking at her Zoe thought of the verse from St. John—"Ye shall see Heaven open——" But she did not look at her for long. She was scanning the dock for Bob's face and finally she found it, upturned towards hers. Senator and Mrs. Morton were there, too, and when Zoe saw them only one thought flashed through her mind. "This time Bob and I won't have to think about what's going to happen to Helen. She could have had a man of her own here to meet her if she'd wanted him; but she didn't. She can go on to Washington with her father and mother. Bob and I can stay here by ourselves."

She knew that his thought had been the same as hers when he caught her in his arms and hugged her as though he would never let her go; and when at last she could get her breath she murmured, beating him to it: "You see I can get down a gangplank fast when I want to." After that customs and reporters engulfed them, but not for long and not entirely. Helen and Zoe had asked the Captain to give them the privilege of presenting their own people to him, and they watched and waited eagerly until the slight, nonchalant figure with its jaunty air and its well-worn decoration came into view.

"Bob," they said excitedly. "Mother—Father—we want you to meet the Captain of our liner." Zoe's eyes met Helen's in the midst of the flutter of introductions and the cordial clasping of hands, then, under their breath, they both added, spontaneously and simultaneously, "He is one ver' nice man."

The Captain promised to come to dine with them the next night at the Commodore. Senator and Mrs. Morton had thought of staying over an extra day, in any case, so it appeared; the presentation of the Captain decided them. They would have a delightful little dinner for six, Mrs. Morton said.

"Zoe," she remarked with characteristic impressiveness. "Zoe, are you certain it will be convenient to have the dinner in the suite which Bob says he has engaged? Because if it is not—of course, the Senator and I have not taken a suite. Just a very nice double

room with twin beds at the Roosevelt. And we have tentatively reserved an adjacent single room for Helen. But, of course, the reservation could probably be changed to more commodious quarters. Though, personally, I have always felt it a needless extravagance to have a private parlour."

"Of course it will be convenient, Mrs. Morton," Zoe interrupted her to say. "Did you ever hear of its being inconvenient for me to have company? But we can't all get into the same taxi, can we, with this mound of baggage? You and Father take Helen with you, and Bob and I'll snatch another. *Au revoir, Commandant. A demain! Sept heures et demie!*"

She detached herself from the others and linking her arm through Bob's went towards the elevator as rapidly as her ankle would permit. It was a great deal better, but it was by no means well yet, and she was annoyed that it interfered with her speed. The breathless, hustling porter met them below with her bags, a gigantic orange-coloured taxi swung up, and they piled into it and darted off at dizzy speed across the cobblestones, the jostling crowds that swarmed under the very wheels, parting to let them through. Bob was gripping her hand fast, and Zoe turned to him, trying hard to keep her voice steady.

"I wrote every day on the 'freight-air,'" she said. "I hope you'll like my pieces. I honestly believe they're pretty good. I've brought them all safely back to you."

"The same old guts," he said, trying to speak steadily too. Then he stopped trying and tightened his grip on her hand. "Of course the pieces are good. They couldn't help being if you wrote them. And the subscribers are simply screaming for them. We'll get the one you think ought to go out first on the wire right away, and I've arranged to have you broadcast from New York instead of Washington at ten tomorrow morning. But what really matters is that you've come home yourself. You look like a million dollars, too—not at all like the proverbial lady who's been through the wars. You must have taken time off to do some shopping in Bordeaux. It looks to me like there was an extra overlay of silver on those foxes, and as if you had about a dozen of them slung over you here and there. I'm not pleased to see you limping like an aged cripple, and we'll have a few words on the subject of your silence about that later on. But I've been listening all the time we've been on the wharf. And do you know, I haven't heard you cough once?"

PART X

CHAPTER XL

"I'M very sorry, Mrs. Rutherford, but you see this is a news bureau sending out a column that goes all over the country, and I have to stick to material which has a general appeal, and pare it down pretty close to the bone because of space limitations. These benefits are interesting locally—— Yes, I know the list of patronesses is very imposing, that is, here, but it doesn't mean so much in Seattle or Santa Fé. Yes, I know the benefits are for very worthy causes too, but you see, women in Seattle and Santa Fé—those are just examples, of course—are organizing too, and they think their work is important and their social leaders impressive. Besides, I'm sure you understand that I couldn't write a story about one benefit without writing stories about them all, and then there wouldn't be any room left to discuss such events as the British blockade or the invasion of Finland or the capture of Nanking, and those have all loomed pretty large on the international horizon this last month. I really do have to say something about those. Why don't you call up Brenda Bryant on the *Examiner*? She does the sort of thing you have in mind awfully well, and she has the space for it—Mr. Kahn encourages her to use it—Oh, I don't believe she could have been, intentionally. Brenda's never rude to anyone. But she is busy, like the rest of us, and sometimes telephone calls do cut into a day's work."

"You said that so sweetly, I don't believe the old gorgon caught on," Bob said as Zoe hung up the receiver. "But why do you bother with calls like that anyway? Why don't you have Pearl Gray automatically say you're not at home when they come to the house, and let Gracie take them over when they come to the office? She can point out what you just have, only a little more brutally."

"I can't be brutal to a poor forlorn old creature like Mrs. Rutherford. These benefits are all that are left of her departed glory. I think it's sad to see her."

"I thought they were supposed to benefit the British and the French and the Poles and so forth, not superannuated social leaders in Washington."

"Well, they are, of course. And I can be pretty brutal when someone young and vicious like Marie Basanta calls me up. But Mrs. Rutherford and Mrs. Burgess still sort of get me. I can't help remembering what they were like when I first came to Washington and what they're like now. It's pathetic."

"Considering the way they treated you when you first came to Washington I shouldn't think you'd let that bother you much."

"Who's the hard-boiled member of the family now? I'm ashamed of you, Bob!"

She looked at him with a smile that belied even the very mild severity of her words. It was evening and they were at home in their library, with the fire burning brightly, and a mug of beer standing on either corner of the table where the radio script over which they were working was spread out. Their broadcasts had been an immediate success, and though so far they had stuck pretty closely to their original plan of giving their programmes alternately, they shared in the preparation of all of them, and the method worked out very well.

They had been almost through for the night when Mrs. Rutherford's call had come in, and now Bob took a long pull at his beer mug, stretched himself and yawned. "We're hearing an awful lot about a phony war," he said, "but I think things are phony right here in Washington. I understand that nearly two hundred war reliefs groups have registered with the State Department already, and I don't believe that more than half of them know what it's all about, any more than I believe most of the politicians do either. It seems to me that all the little people are going around in circles, and that all the big ones are making futile gestures. What good does it do to ban wire-tapping and set up moral embargoes and issue appeals against bombing civilians in open cities? Nothing that I can see, except to give us something to write about and broadcast about. As for these women who are knitting shawls out of black wool and rolling bandages all over the place, they give me a pain. Not because of what they're doing, but because of the way they're doing it. They all seem to be taking a ghoulish delight in the process. Well, maybe not all. But certainly some. And if their names aren't listed in the papers, they surely do raise merry hell. Don't let them wear you down, Zoe. You've got enough on your hands without bothering about them. And what you're doing does amount to something."

"I'm glad you think so. I saw Mrs. Burgess, one of the other members of the old triumvirate, the other day and she asked me if I were still writing. Of course, none of that set realizes such a question is like asking a lawyer if he still has any practice, or a doctor if all his patients have left him. So I answered with a modest 'yes' and didn't try to say anything more. But my reticence had no reward. She came back by asking, 'Anything worthwhile?' All of which makes me the more grateful for your spontaneous compliment."

"The woman's in her dotage. Every time I see her she starts in on a long serial story. I thought that before 'social usages' became a lost art girls used to be trained in small talk. But that woman

never heard of it. I have yet to hear her relate an anecdote that didn't embrace at least ten years. I've got so I run when I see her coming. You ought to do the same."

"I do have hard work being polite to her."

"Don't try to be polite. You shouldn't think of it. You're too much of a person, Zoe, to let an old has-been like Mrs. Burgess prey on you."

He put an affectionate arm around her shoulder, and the fondness in his voice had a warm ring to it. For the first time in her life, Zoe was making a determined effort to conserve her strength, and Bob was very happy because this was so. Zoe found this gladness of his reflected in her own. She did not go to the office every day now, but accomplished more and more routine work at home, while Bob was gone, finding that in this way she was far fresher, mentally as well as physically, and could collaborate with him far more effectively than when they constantly shared a double desk. What was more, except for an occasional week-end at Hunter's Green, where Bob had gone with her, and which had been very quiet because of Ronnie's impending confinement, she had hardly been out of town at all since her return to the United States. She had steadfastly turned a deaf ear to all suggestions that she should appear on various widely separated platforms, under the auspices of numerous organizations and under conditions of varying inconvenience, in return for "honoraria" which sounded substantial, but which, as Bob had previously pointed out, underwent considerable paring by the time travelling expenses and an agent's fee had been deducted from them. She had lost some money in this way and she had missed some zestful experiences, for new people and new places were invariably stimulating to her; but she had been enabled to enjoy others, for she had time now to see something of her neighbours in Alexandria, where she was finding the local life more and more delightful, and she had gained immeasurably in repose of both manner and spirit. Moreover, she had liberated long stretches of time for creative writing. "Indian Plantain," in book form, had already gone to press, both in England and the United States, and was scheduled for early spring publication; and a series of sketches, entitled "Forever France," appearing simultaneously in the *Tribunal* and the *Observer*, had already brought her a larger reader response than anything she had ever written. Into these sketches she had poured all the feeling that had first shaken and exalted her when she was living among the high red rooftops of Paris, and which, rising to greater heights and penetrating to more profound depths every time she returned to France, had culminated in her perilous voyage home on the French freighter. But feeling alone, no matter how sincere and stirring and how firmly based on long observation and experience, would never have lifted the sketches above the level of mass production; it was the sureness and

skill with which they were written which had done that. Neither the resourcefulness, the dogged determination, nor the natural "nose for news" which were responsible for her rise in journalism, nor even the love of beauty and submerged strain of mysticism which had contributed to her unexpected adaptability for fiction could wholly account for the revelation of a great gift embodied in "Forever France." When Bob said what she was doing now was worthwhile, his understatement was based on no failure to appreciate the magnitude of her contribution to current thought and current literature.

She did not answer, except by instinctive response to his caress, because no reply was necessary; it was not needful to put their mutual understanding into words. For a moment she stood still, quiescent in his embrace; then, freeing herself gently, she moved nearer the fire and stood looking into it.

"You're right, it is a phony winter," she said slowly. "I notice it in all sorts of little ways, besides the big ways you've mentioned—there are rumours that Mrs. Townsend's going to discontinue the morning musicales at the Mayflower; they may survive one more season, but I doubt if they do any longer than that. Whether something else will happen to wrench the mink coats out of moth-balls remains to be seen. And did you know that poor William, the old carriageman, had died? Official receptions won't seem the same any more, now that he won't be there in his bottle-green coat and tall hat and silver buttons, to call out 'Cuba's cyar!' and greet everyone by name."

"I'm sorry about poor old William. But official receptions aren't the same anyway, are they, quite aside from him and his megaphone and his bottle-green coat?"

"No, they aren't. Don't you remember how everyone has rushed to the Soviet Embassy these last few years, to gorge themselves on sturgeon and caviare and guzzle vodka and champagne and wander peering all over the house? Well, you probably noticed that this year almost all of official Washington was either 'out of town' or 'indisposed' on the anniversary of the establishment of Russia's 'independence.'"

"I do, now you speak of it. I foresee two very smooth sketches from the pen of that rising young writer, Zoe Wing, one entitled 'Cuba's Car' and the other 'Communitistic Caviare.' How's that for alliteration?"

"It's good as alliteration, and it's still better as a tip. Thanks a lot, Bob. I'll follow it up tomorrow. By the way, did I tell you I'd just heard that Alicia Roszel has left the Italian Embassy and gone to the Argentine Ambassadress as social secretary? Just another of those straws— It's the Latin-Americans who are invited everywhere now, whom everyone is courting and cajoling. Do you remember when Alfredo came here, what an inferiority complex he

developed because he found he was never invited to really important parties except to fill in? And yet there wasn't a man, among the younger diplomats, who could touch him in distinction and culture and character, and he was just as attractive as he could be, on top of that. I'm not saying anything against these present Argentinians. I think they're both charmers. But I do wish Alfredo, who was so unresentful and so sporting about it all, and yet so hungry for friendliness, could have had a little of the same sort of attention they're getting."

"Yes, I wish he might have—— Well, Alicia always was a hard-headed little thing. There's no doubt she knows which side her bread is buttered. I suppose the Italians don't need a social secretary at all these days."

"I don't believe they do, really. But they're still putting up a pretence. Isabel's gone there."

"Isabel!"

"Yes. Betty Lichtenstein found she didn't quite fill the bill. I didn't have anything to do with it, directly or indirectly, Bob—— Betty never heard about my little conversation with Isabel while you were seeing the crew's quarters, or anything else to her disadvantage, at least from me. It's just that she couldn't make the grade. Betty expects a high degree of efficiency, combined with impeccable social standing and unlimited physical strength. She's been very nice to Isabel. She didn't turn her adrift until Isabel was sure of something else, and she still invites her to her larger cocktail parties and things like that. But Isabel's slipping. Of course, she never learned stenography, and that's more and more of a requisite. And she really is beginning to be frail now, in a way she used to like to pretend she was, the way Giles believed she was. She can't stand up under the strain of long hours and hard work. As to her social standing—— Does anyone remember who Stephen Windsor is any more?"

"It's to be hoped nobody does, considering that he's a driveling maniac—— Well, I should think the Italians' social pace was just about suited to Isabel's present capacities, from what you tell me. And I suppose, at that, she wouldn't have got the job if it hadn't been for Candace?"

"No. Candace was sorry for her. Candace always has been very kind-hearted, you know that. And she's having hard enough sledging herself to be sympathetic."

They both stood for a few minutes looking into the fire without speaking, but absorbed in kindred thoughts. Bob was the first to go on.

"Now that you've brought up the names of certain former friends we don't see much nowadays, I can't help thinking of Helen in connection with them. She hasn't written me in a dog's age. Do you know anything about her plans?"

"I don't think she has any. You do know that she went over to New York for the Horse Show, and apparently she had an unexpectedly good time there. The Hogans, who own Tivoli, in Middleburg, had a box—the money that enabled Mr. Hogan to become a Virginia country gentleman was made partly in repaving Broadway and partly at Tammany Hall, so he's very much at home in Manhattan. Helen and Flora Treadway were their guests, and I believe several men went along too. Besides, some members of the Mexican Army team competing for the Bowman Challenge Cup are relatives of the Terrazas, and one of them was the winner—he had the only perfect round. I gather his 'perfect rounds' weren't confined to Madison Square Garden either, and that Helen was in on all of them that weren't stag. Besides all the parties that were given at private houses, the Waldorf was simply humming with buffet luncheons and midnight suppers and floor shows and so forth, in honour of the exhibitors and the judges and the international teams, and as far as I can make out Helen didn't miss a trick. There was a picture of her in one of the rotogravure sections wearing a looped white faille dress and a hooded jacket, with mittens to match, made of white fox, that was just too cute for words. I meant to put it on your desk."

"I'd like to see it. Just how closely does it tie in with the Mexican team?"

"Why, either jointly or singly, the members of this team persuaded her it was high time she paid another visit to Mexico! I don't know whether it was before or after her appearance in the baby-bunting costume I've just described to you, though if it wasn't before, I imagine that would have done the trick. Anyway, she went back on the same boat with them, and since her arrival in Mexico I haven't heard anything that sounds as if she were thinking of coming home. She's staying with the Terrazas, to the satisfaction of all concerned, and I gather she's cutting a pretty wide swathe socially."

"The Terrazas must know about Guy by this time."

"Yes, I suppose they do. But you may be sure she's put the matter before them very skilfully. And, after all, Guy's still in Paris."

"Poor devil! I don't see how she had the heart to leave him there alone."

"You forget. Helen isn't engaged to marry a counsellor at the British Embassy in Paris. She's engaged to marry the first British minister under an ambassador in the United States. And you can't blame Helen for not wanting to see a war at close quarters. Not after the carnage at Coyoacan."

"Well, perhaps not. But I'm sorry for Guy just the same. I think he deserves something better than what she's handing out to him. Not that it's a very nice thing to say about my sister. And not

that I've ever ceased to be thankful she stuck by you until the 'flagship' of the French Line brought you safely into port."

Again he put his arm affectionately around her shoulder. "We have everything in shape to 'leave lay' on the broadcast, haven't we?" he asked. "That is, you don't think the part about the *Graf Spee* needs any more revision, do you? What do you say we get to bed before another nice old lady calls you up, and asks you to write about the Lafayette Fund, or the French-American Wives Committee, or the American Society for French Medical and Civilian Aid, or Le Paquet au Front? They all know you haven't any real backbone about saying no when it comes to anything French. You better keep the drawer when you have your cheque-book locked up. I might be tempted to take a look at it someday. And I bet if I did I'd see you didn't have enough of a balance left to pay for the groceries out of your 'Forever France' money. And as I recall it, you'd agreed to do that, so that everything that we got from the broadcasting could go into paying off the mortgage on the old homestead."

There was plenty of money in Zoe's bank account to pay for groceries, even though Bob's suspicions concerning her expenditures were by no means unfounded. Financially her worries, like Ronnie's, were behind her, and physically she was growing stronger and stronger all the time. But she was more and more aware of the deadly hatreds and unrestrained conflicts of the world in which she was living, and as the "phony" war gradually gathered momentum, its spreading menace seemed to come closer and closer to her personally, while the "phony" condition of affairs in Washington itself became increasingly confusing. By January the primary intention of the capital's philanthropically minded social leaders had shifted from French Relief to Finnish Relief. Mrs. Rutherford and others of her sort, who continued to beseech free publicity from Zoe, could no longer sugar their suggestions with the cooing statement that since they were asking help for her "second country" she surely could not deny it. Finland was not Zoe's "second country," she had never even been there; and though her admiration was roused by the vision of the white-clad troops valiantly setting forth on snowshoes against the Red Peril which so soon swept over them in a scarlet stream, she could not help sadly wondering how long it would take for them also to be overlooked or forgotten in the excitement over some new cause.

It was not quite as soon as she expected. There were musicales at the Sulgrave Club and the Mayflower for Finnish Relief, picture sales at the Shoreham and the Raleigh for Finnish Relief, and benefit performances of plays and movies for Finnish Relief. Gifts of every variety poured into the Finnish Legation, including—according to Brenda Bryant—a hunting rifle, a horse and a box

of uncut diamonds. Brenda was also the authority for saying that doctors were sending receipted bills to the members of the Legation staff and marking these bills "Use for Finland." The current quip, concerning Mrs. Rutherford, was on everyone's lips: "Oh! Haven't you heard? Poor old lady, she's gone with the Finns!"

There was not only a change in the attitude of Washington towards the diplomats, there was also a change in the attitude of the diplomats towards Washington. A number of them began to cultivate acquaintances among Americans whom they had previously ignored. There was an unescapable inference that it had dawned on them, rather tardily, that it might be a good plan for them to build up goodwill for their respective countries among the rank and file, hitherto regarded with contempt. This attitude was unmistakably fostered by the fact that, with the exception of the Latin-Americans, it became a little more difficult for them to fraternize with other diplomats. The Germans, the Soviets and the Japanese dined with each other, but with almost nobody else. The Italians, still handicapped by the undeclared attitude of the home Government, dined practically nowhere. On the other hand, the British, the French and the Finns were seen everywhere together and were everywhere fêted. The British Ambassador threw the doors of his chilly embassy wide open for two benefits, the first extremely select, the second available to anyone who would or could pay a dollar to get in. One commentator remarked that more senators, representatives and top-flight capital officials had been fêted there within the last six months of the season than had ever before seen the inside of the cavernous dining-room. Senator and Mrs. Morton were among the officials thus favoured, and Mrs. Morton, in telling Zoe about the dinner she and her husband had attended, took occasion to retract most of the remarks she had made the year before when the question of invitations to the Royal Garden Party was still hanging in the balance.

"Zoe," she said impressively, "Zoe. You know how hard I always try to be fair. After all, it is very unjust to judge a nation by a single representative of that country. I am convinced that if the present British Ambassador had only been here last year all that unpleasantness would not have occurred. What a pity that he is a bachelor! It is so hard for a man to bear the burden of official entertaining alone. But, after all, when Guy and dear little Helen are married——"

"When Guy and dear little Helen are married," Zoe said to herself, completing the sentence, "Helen will be the official hostess of the British Embassy in Washington. And dear little Helen won't get married until she's sure of that. She'll stay in Mexico, at the Casa Catalina, surrounded by every imaginable luxury, and by Alfredo's family, who are almost smothering her with attentions now. She won't go to Guy. There is food rationing in Britain

already. It may spread to France at any moment. Anything may happen in France. Daladier's resigned. No great loss. But will Reynaud do any better? Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, has warned the neutrals they can't keep out of the war, beseeching them to join the Allies, and they have declined to listen. Russia has swallowed up Finland in the very face of the Allies' offer of 'full aid'—whatever that might mean—to the valiant snowshoed troops who preferred to 'die on their feet than to live on their knees.' Hitler and Mussolini have 'conferred' at the Brenner Pass. Whose fate was sealed at this conference? It's still too soon to say. And too soon to say when Guy will leave Paris and why. If it only isn't too late, at least so late that Helen won't ever be able to forget that she wasn't there when he most needed her"—

But Helen, apparently, was destined to remain untouched a second time by tragedy. It was in April that she heard from Guy of his transfer and cabled her consent to "arranging" her marriage immediately after his arrival in Washington. She wired Zoe, too, saying that she would return at once from Mexico and spend the weeks intervening before her wedding with her brother and sister-in-law at Heritage, if that would be agreeable to them. It would be so much simpler to "arrange" everything from there. Zoe wired back that she would be delighted to have her, but, as a matter of sober fact, Zoe was finding delight in almost nothing during those days. For this was just after Germany had "occupied" Denmark in a surprise overnight movement, and invaded Norway through the help of men who, as starving children, had been sent there from their homeland after the first World War, to return as traitors, familiar with her land and her language, to the foster mother who had nurtured them in their hour of need.

"Do you really want to bother with this wedding?" Bob asked Zoe, as she saw her unsmiling preparations for it. "I thought you were terribly pleased about it at first. But your heart doesn't seem to be in it any more— You didn't leave part of that in France by any chance, did you? I have moments of feeling that you did, and that perhaps I ought to remind you I have a prior claim on it."

"I haven't forgotten about your prior claim. But I confess I'm not in the mood for marrying and giving in marriage. I suppose I'll have to snap out of that, though— By this time next year there'll be an epidemic of weddings all around us. Have you noticed the upward trend of women's skirts? I've heard that's always the first sign of impending war. Perhaps the second sign's akin to it. Anyway, every second man of draft age will suddenly decide he wants to get married. Perhaps all those pretty exposed legs have something to do with it. But I wouldn't know really."

Bob saw that she was making a determined effort to free herself from the apprehension and depression which each new advance of

the German army intensified in her breast. There was no more talk about a "phony" war by this time, and now that it had reached a far more deadly stage he knew that she would have been glad to set back the hands of the clock to the time when there was. In Washington itself there was plenty which was still very "phony." China and Poland were coming to the fore as the recipients of benefits, supplanting Finland. The staff at the Finnish Legation was reduced from forty to twenty-five; a Washington Committee for Aid to China was formed at the Phillip's Memorial Gallery, and there was a concert at the Polish Embassy under the auspices of the Washington Committee for Polish Relief; tea was sold at the Barnard College Club, the proceeds going to China, and there was a soiree for the benefit of Polish children in the west ballroom of the Shoreham. But still the French did not fade wholly out of the picture. The French film "Harvest" was shown at the Little Theatre under the auspices of the American Association of Teachers of French; cockade pins were sold by Friends of France; the attachés of the French Embassy sang gay little songs at cocktail parties; and the French and British diplomats hailed each other with conspicuous goodwill at these and all other functions.

And then came Dunkirk, and they stopped speaking to each other, and did not seem to see each other if they met in the same house, which was not often, because all of Washington, in the throes of its first war jitters, united in a sudden desperate effort to make sure that they did not.

But fortunately, as Zoe said to Bob with sad sarcasm, Helen's marriage feast was not complicated by this unexpected contingency. She was able to invite both the British and the French diplomats to her wedding, the French very much at ease at Heritage, where they had all often been before, the British less so, as most of them had not previously taken the trouble to darken its door. Helen wore the shell-pink satin, with her pearls, as she had planned, and Zoe and Ronnie the green brocade—Ronnie's fourth son, fortunately, had been born early in the new year, so there was nothing at all the matter with her figure—in fact, it was quite noticeably good, and helped, fully as much as her colouring, to set off the effect of the emeralds. Helen had found, in Mexico, a beautiful old necklace which was said to have belonged to the Empress Carlota and which went with Ronnie's very well; of this she had insisted on making a present to Zoe, who accepted it with such unconcealed pleasure that Bob wondered, rather tardily, why he had not thought, long before, of giving her some jewellery in addition to her engagement ring. (There was no reason why he should not think of doing so now, with the house nearly paid for, and a tidy sum salted away for insurance and all that.) The violin and the harp made the softest imaginable music, and Helen came down the stately stairway, very slowly, on her father's arm, while the

candlelight shone with soft radiance in the spacious panelled rooms. Ronnie had provided ancestral recipes for wedding cake and other delicacies, and the supply of champagne, passed around on silver trays, was inexhaustible. There was no doubt at all that it was the outstanding wedding of the spring. Helen's picture, and the pictures of the entire wedding party—including, of course, that of the British Ambassador, who kindly condescended to act as his new Minister's best man—appeared in every important paper in the country; and Mrs. Morton, busily gathering together innumerable clippings to send to her friends in Arkansas, who had not been able to come on to the wedding and who might miss reading about it, did so with a triumphant expression which never once faded, while the notices—apparently as inexhaustible as the champagne—held out.

"Zoe," she said to her daughter-in-law. "Zoe, of course it is very dull tedious work for me to take charge of sending out such quantities of clippings. I don't want to criticize, my dear—you know I never like to do that—but I can't help feeling that some of the work might have been handled by your office force. Mine is too busy to undertake any little extras, but surely that vulgar young receptionist of yours—who in my opinion doesn't add to the tone of the place *at all*—must have a great deal of spare time on her hands. Not that I'm complaining. I want all our dear ones at home to share in dear little Helen's supreme happiness. Wasn't she a beautiful bride, Zoe? Don't you feel privileged to have had a wedding like that in your house?"

"~~She did look lovely,~~" Zoe admitted. "And she's always been very welcome to do anything she wanted in my house, you know that. But I can't help wishing she'd married Guy in Paris, when he begged her to. I think her marriage might have meant more to her in the end. Oh, well! I suppose while I'm wishing, I might as well say I wish Queen Wilhelmina hadn't left her own people and taken refuge in England after giving that broadcast on invincibility. And that Churchill had succeeded Chamberlain as Prime Minister a little sooner. And that Weygand had replaced Gamelin at the head of the French forces before the Germans were let through to a second Sedan. Do you realize they're only eighty miles from Paris at this minute, Mrs. Morton?"

"I thought it was nearer a hundred. Are you sure, Zoe, that it's only eighty? Well, that's very unfortunate, of course. But after all, we were talking about sweet little Helen, weren't we, my dear? I don't ever mean to be critical. I reminded you of that once already this afternoon. But it does seem to me, Zoe, that sometimes you stray from the subject. What have Queen Wilhelmina and Mr. Chamberlain and General Weygand got to do with Helen's happiness?"

"I wish I knew, Mrs. Morton," Zoe said sadly.

CHAPTER XLI

"EUROPE has invaded Washington, and if the American capital in the present stage of our war—and there's no doubt we're in it—is more wrought up than were London, Paris, Rome or Berlin before the German armies went into action, it is pretty certain that no European Government is quite as astonished as we are by the catastrophic course events have taken since. Of all the nations that have suffered terrible awakenings during this black month we were the least prepared for the realities we now face."

Zoe laid down the *New York Times* with a sigh, wishing that it might have been she instead of Anne O'Hare McCormick who had written those lines. There was no commentator, either man or woman, in Zoe's opinion, whose knowledge of European events and psychology and whose skill in presenting these equalled that of this "journalists' journalist." Now she revealed a similarly amazing grasp of Washington's frantic apprehension. It had passed from a period of complacency to a period of shock; and emerging with one bound from its stunned condition had begun to act as if it were already in danger of immediate attack. Householders looked up at aeroplanes soaring overhead as if these might be expected to begin dropping bombs at any moment; statesmen declaimed about an enemy army as if it were already crossing the Potomac; editors spread black banner lines three inches high across the front pages of their papers. The fever with which the capital is proverbially ridden, in and out of season, soared suddenly to a perilous pitch.

And yet, never since that time in the twenties which everyone had almost forgotten, had there been so many parties in Washington. The crop of spring débutantes was the largest within memory, representing rich returns for Lavinia Lovelace, who had grown increasingly plump and prosperous with the passage of years. But it was not only débutante parties by any means that kept the squirrel cage whirling. The plans, tentative and concrete, of beautiful young divorcees, instead of being veiled in secrecy, were prominently featured in the society sections: "It is reported that Mrs. Alvin T. Rutledge will leave at the end of this month for Reno where her husband has already gone to establish residence for a divorce, so that she will need to remain only two weeks. Mrs. Rutledge is the former Eva Irwin, daughter of the former Senator Ernest S. Irwin and former wife of Mr. Harry H. Roszel, of the Department of the Interior." Pending Mrs. Rutledge's departure, she was much in

evidence everywhere, especially at cocktail parties, where she was always surrounded by a gay group. She had grown increasingly loquacious with the passage of years, though Helen's first impression of her at Mrs. Endicott's luncheon had been that no one could possibly talk as fast and say as little as she did. But her chatter, loud and incessant as it was, did not suffice to drown out the rumours and reports with which the heated rooms rang. Sometimes, when a party lasted unusually long, or liquor was poured with an unusually lavish hand, the rumours and reports assumed strange shapes in the form of indiscreet or incriminating statements. At one such function Zoe was close enough to three young aviators, an American recently returned from China and two Japanese, to overhear an exchange of repartee more startling than prudent.

"I know that part of the river well. It's where the *Panay* was sunk. You didn't do the bombing, did you?"

"No, but one of my students did."

She shuddered at the reckless laughter that followed this statement and moved away, seeking escape from the raucousness and confusion that seemed to hem her in on every side. People tore about as if they could not bear to keep still and shouted as if they could not bear to keep silent, and anyone who declined an invitation on the ground of having already accepted another was regarded as an oddity.

"I'm sorry, but I just can't make it. I promised the Joneses three weeks ago."

"Oh, but we're going to have such a good time!"

"Yes, of course, but you see——"

"Everyone's going to be there. You don't know what you'll be missing."

"I do know. But I haven't learned the secret of being in more than one place at once."

"My dear, it's simple. Just be late in going to the Joneses or early in coming to me. If you really wanted to——"

"Oh, all right."

In the brief intervals between parties and in the wee small hours after these were over, people grasped with mingled terror and fascination at tidings of world events. They kept their radios going day and night, they rushed out to buy the extras that were shouted through the streets. And yet they did not half read the news or listen to it. They were too busy hastening to each other's houses telling each other weird tales which they foisted upon one another, losing their tempers when differences of opinion were disclosed or when arguments involving the topics of appeasement or resistance proved unconvincing. It was at such times as these that excited voices grew louder and louder and that hands, which seemed almost ready to strike, reached out for drink after drink.

To a surprising degree Helen and Guy, back in Washington after a brief honeymoon at White Sulphur, succeeded in keeping aloof from this uproar. Not that they did not go out a great deal, for a dinner was given in their honour almost every night. But Helen was discovering daily that Guy had almost unlimited reserves of self-control and quietude on which to draw. His private world centred around her, he told her, though she hardly needed the telling; and the greater world, which had its core in England, would be better served if he did not pour out his reserve strength for it too freely, until due need of this arose. Helen marvelled to see him so calm when she knew how single-hearted his love for his country was, and how unwavering his desire to help it. But when she told him so, he only smiled at her.

"Didn't you ever read Milton, sweetheart? No? Was that one of the poets we overlooked before? Then we must read him together now."

"How can we take time to read Milton? Everyone says there isn't time to read anything nowadays except the newspapers, and hardly those. What did Milton write, specifically, I mean, that you're thinking of him at this moment?"

"A line that reads, 'They also serve who only stand and wait.' And we have time to read, darling. We always will have. When we go back to Star Hundred, I'll read to you every evening, in front of the library fire, just as I used to. And you'll sew or knit or something like that. And then, of course, we'll have tea before we go to bed, in the good English way. We'll be just an old-fashioned country squire and a lady bountiful."

"I'd love that, Guy. After we get older. I don't suppose we'll want to do it much while we're still young, do you? And unless something should happen to Star Hundred. Of course we have to think of that too."

"Nothing will happen to Star Hundred. That is, naturally, it may be bombed or destroyed in some other way. But if it is, we'll build a new house ourselves as much like it as we can. Smaller and simpler, so it won't cost so much. Perhaps very small and simple. But it'll be Star Hundred just the same. Because Grenvilles will live in it, just as they have for hundred of years, and keep its essential spirit. That's what counts."

They had taken the house on Massachusetts Avenue near the Embassy which had formerly belonged to Stephen and Isabel Windsor and which was well suited to their needs. Bob and Zoe were there with them a great deal, dropping in for an afternoon cocktail or an evening nightcap or for dinner when none of them was dining elsewhere, which was not very often. They exchanged both news and views with mutual profit and found that in the end these visits were actual time savers for them in their work; and

it was a proud day for Zoe when she was able to bring Guy a report on the matter about which he had consulted her the previous summer.

Her ability to do this came about in a strange way: She had continued to keep close to Washington throughout the winter, but late in the spring she went over to New York to attend a marriage. The bride was the daughter of a former envoy from one of the small "neutral" nations to the United States, and since his death she and her mother had been living very simply in an unpretentious hotel. The family was one which had shown Zoe many courtesies during her visits to their country while they were still in power, and the girl was marrying a journalist who was one of Zoe's oldest friends. When they expressed a definite desire to have her present at their quiet wedding she did not feel that she could decline; and Bob upheld her in her decision though he could not go with her, since it was impossible just then for them both to leave the bureau at the same time.

Zoe took an early afternoon plane and went straight from the airport to the hotel, for the simple ceremony was being held in the little suite where the bride and her mother had long been living. As she went down the inconspicuous corridor, at right angles from the main hallway on that particular floor, which led towards this suite, she noticed, without even passing interest at first, two men who were walking down it in front of her. They were engaged in earnest conversation which they were carrying on in an undertone; but after a moment she realized that they were speaking German. As they turned to unlock the door of the suite adjoining the one to which she was going, she saw that the taller of the two was Hermann Schmidt; the other was a short stout man with a shiny face, closely cropped hair and a head noticeably flat in the rear which suddenly bulged into a roll of fat at the neckline. From the recesses of her "alleged" mind a description she had tucked away there for future references suddenly shot forward: "He's *echt Deutsch*—paunchy, sharp-nosed, bespectacled, bald-pated, with a big roll of fat at the back of a perfectly flat head where it joins equally flat shoulders——"

"Why, Herr Schmidt! What a pleasant surprise to see you in New York! Are you located here now? And are you coming to the wedding too? I remember that Rita was one of your old friends."

Herr Schmidt did not appear to feel that the surprise of meeting was to him a particularly pleasant one. He answered Zoe with careful courtesy, saying that he was in New York briefly on business and that unfortunately he had no time for nuptial celebrations while engaged in this. He did not present his companion, and after a perfunctory bow, which the short man copied in as far as his build would permit, both disappeared inside the door they had

previously unlocked. Zoe went on to the wedding in a pensive mood. When the ceremony was over, and she was leaving the hotel, she paused casually at the desk.

"Is Herr Doktor Georg Keppler registered here?" she inquired.

"Yes. Suite 10. Use the house telephone," the clerk answered with equal nonchalance, turning to greet another guest.

She picked up the receiver, doubtful what to say when her summons was answered. Then, seeing that the clerk was still engrossed with the newcomer and that he had forgotten her completely, she replaced the receiver on the hook. After all, she already knew what she wanted to find out, or thought she did. She caught an evening plane, wiring Bob to have Zallie meet her at the airport, and saying that she was going to see Guy and Helen before starting for Alexandria. She would be glad if he could meet her at their house. If that wasn't convenient, she would be seeing him at home around midnight.

Bob was still at the office, Guy informed her when she reached the Massachusetts Avenue house; he had telephoned to say that he was sorry he had been detained; but he was trying to write a dissertation—there was nothing else to call it—on the discussion of subversive activities and registration of aliens which had taken place that day in the Senate. Zoe chuckled.

"I reckon I'll have to go down there and help him with it if that's the case. I might give him a few pointers. But first I'll pass a little news item along to you. Your friend Herr Doktor Georg Keppler has a select small office at a quiet hotel in New York. And my erstwhile constant follower, Hermann Schmidt, is sharing it with him."

If anything could have happened to make Zoe even more welcome in Guy's sight than she had been before, the timeliness of the tidings she brought with her on this occasion would have done it. She dropped in with increasing frequency, feeling herself more and more an essential part of the new household. It was easier for Guy to see her and Bob in town than to try to get out to Heritage, and they were both glad to go to his house, in spite of the pressure of their work, which was terrific. Zoe had begun to go to the office every day again because it seemed evident to her that Bob could not handle without her help both the survey of National Defence, American mobilization and other vital questions before the Senate, and the volume of news pouring in from Europe. His nerves had begun to be frayed at the edges for the first time in a long while, and she recognized this as a danger signal. Incidentally dark circles had begun to show around her eyes, and Bob, in spite of his own fatigue, saw them and spoke of them.

"You've got to cut down on something, Zoe. If you don't, you'll pass straight out of the picture again one of these days, just after

getting into such good shape. Let Mary take over more. She's getting darn good."

"I know. And I am giving her more and more to do all the time. But I don't want to push her too hard. She can't drive her work yet. It still drives her. Besides, I can't send her to the White House or turn over the foreign news to her. I have to look after those two items myself, and they're pretty sizable ones in these days."

"I'll say they are. But we'd better be looking around for another person to add to the staff who could go to the conferences or has had some European experience."

"I am looking around, very adroitly. But I haven't found anyone yet. I'll let you know if I do."

He nodded, without trying to thrash the matter out with her. There was no time in those days for the long talks that meant so much to them both, except late at night, and then they were too exhausted to talk, and too fearful that if they tried they would say things they did not mean or want to say, which might hurt each other. They both knew by this time that words like those left deep scars, and they were determined that there should be no more of those, even at the price of silence. Somehow they would tide over this hard time. It could not continue for ever. But within the last few days the Germans had bombed Paris and begun their fifth offensive on the Somme front, the Allies had evacuated Narvik, and Italy had declared war. France had received her "stab in the back," and the dagger was turning in the wound. Bob, watching Zoe as she turned out her copy, thought about that "little piece of her heart" which he had jestingly accused her of leaving there. He knew it was all too true. In spite of the fullness of her love for him, there would always be a little piece of her heart in that "second country" of hers which she knew so well, and which she interpreted with such supreme sensitivity and skill. Probably that was why she had begun to look so badly again. It was not merely because she was working too hard; it was because she was writing about France, which she loved, and which was in agony.

They discussed the advisability of declining all social engagements of a general character, and confining themselves to their visits with Helen and Guy, while this crisis lasted; but they agreed, in the end, that it could not be done. The different phases of feverish life in the capital, always closely interwoven, were almost inseparable at such a moment as this. It was often when they went out to dinner that they got the one priceless tip which hours of leg work and desk work had failed to yield. In addition to all other considerations was the one that many of the dinners to which they were invited just now were being given in honour of Helen and Guy, and formed the best possible sort of supplement to the limited cocktail hours and midnight conferences that they shared at the

house on Massachusetts Avenue. It was both personally pleasant and professionally important for them to attend such dinners, and one of the largest and most pretentious of these was given by the Lichtensteins.

The night of this dinner Bob and Zoe both dressed so hurriedly that they purposely kept out of each other's way. Then they ran down the stairs and got into the car, still without speaking. Zallie, inopportunately, had come down with the "misery" and they were driving themselves. Zoe had reached the point where she could hardly bear to talk about the state of affairs abroad, Bob the point where he could hardly bear to have her. It was not until they were halfway into Washington that he made one or two trivial remarks.

"The new airport's really beginning to show. I didn't think they'd ever get that river bed filled in."

"I didn't either. And then when they did, it was just a sandpile for another year. But now I reckon we'll be celebrating something there pretty soon. One of those dedications that nobody wants to go to here in Washington and that everybody in the sticks wants to read about."

"Well, you can certainly send Mary to that, if it actually does come off. It looks to me as if dedications and that kind of thing would be crowded out of the spotlight for some time to come."

"Oh yes, I can send Mary to that sort of thing. But you're right. There's no use in counting on making things easier for yourself by sending someone else to cover something that isn't going to happen in a big way."

Again they drove on for some moments without speaking. Bob, glancing covertly at Zoe, and seeing how tense her face was, made another inconsequential remark.

"The traffic's getting worse and worse all the time. We ought to have come over the Memorial Bridge after all, even if it is a little further. We get caught in this bottleneck whenever we try it."

"Well, we can't do anything about it now. There's no left-turn anywhere. And we won't be the only ones that'll be late for the dinner."

It seemed to Bob that the traffic lights had never been so slow in changing. It irritated him afresh to see the cars streaming in another direction while the one he was driving stood still, jammed in between a Coca Cola truck and a model T Ford containing eight ragged negroes. The truck seemed entirely inanimate; presumably it had a driver somewhere, but he was hidden from view. The negroes, undisturbed by the delay, were laughing and joking boisterously. Because their carefree attitude added to his irritation, Bob concentrated his attention on Zoe.

She was certainly very pale, and those violet shadows around her eyes were certainly getting deeper every day. Even when she was extremely tired, she did not usually look like that. Gropingly, he

tried to think when she had looked that way before. Her appearance stirred certain dormant memories, but he could not place them. However, there was something else about her that baffled him less. She had on a white dress, which was very crisp and cool; she wore it well, as she wore all her clothes, and though Bob never saw her personal bills, he knew that it had probably been very expensive, in spite of its delusive air of simplicity. But somehow it reminded Bob of the cheap little white dress she had worn when he had finally found her on the roof of the old Powhatan—now rechristened the Roger Smith—waiting for him, quietly and collectedly, after he had chased her all over town. He put out his hand and touched one of the fresh frills. Zoe saw the gesture and turned towards him with a surprised smile.

"You look like a million dollars," he said, repeating the trite phrase which still carried with it so much undimmed admiration. "Do you know why I did that? This dress reminded me of the one you were wearing the first time I proposed to you."

"It reminded me of that dress too. That's why I bought it."

"Sentimental Sally! I didn't think you had it in you."

"Sentimental yourself, cuddling a frill. Go on, the light's changed at last!"

The car plunged forward into the maelstrom that churned around it. Zoe shook out her full skirt, smoothing the frill that Bob had released. The tense look on her face was gone, and he knew that he had made her happy, both by his caress and by his comment.

"Do you still consult calendars?" she inquired casually.

"Do I still— Gosh, did you see that fellow cut across me? I reckon he wants 'to be an angel and with the angels stand'—I don't know what you're talking about, Zoe."

"Well, you found fault with me once for not telling you a piece of news before you guessed it. You said I might have known you would, that you could look at calendars yourself. But I don't believe you watch them as carefully as you used to, for the purpose you did then, anyway. So this time I hope I'm not too late to give you a thrilling surprise. I'm going to have another baby."

"You're going— Damn you, Zoe Wing, I'd like to break your neck! What do you mean by telling me a thing like that in a place like this!"

The lights had changed again. Bob jerked the car to a stop. Back of his angry exclamation, there was unleashed terror. So that was what the pallor and the violet rings meant! Zoe had kept quiet until she was sure, he knew that, and she had deliberately chosen a time like this to tell him because it gave him no chance to argue with her, because they had to go on to the accursed dinner. But she proceeded to talk serenely and smoothly.

"Glad to hear your expressions of goodwill. But nothing's going

to happen to my neck or anything else. This time I'm coming through with flying colours. I'm going to have a Cæsarian. Everything's all arranged." She slid her hand into his, and went on more seriously. "Please don't worry, Bob. Obstetrics have advanced a lot since—since I was so sick before. Do trust me when I tell you nothing's going wrong now."

"But, Zoe, you told me that the other time. And I nearly lost you. I did lose you, in a way, for a long time. Nothing was quite the same again until just lately. I couldn't bear it if I lost you a second time, in any way."

His mouth had begun to work, painfully. Something had happened to his voice. He shook his head, angrily, so that the tears would not show in his eyes.

"You're not going to lose me in any way. You only lost me before when you began to be afraid and I began to go away. You're right. Nothing was the same afterwards. At least, not until I came home to stay and you forgot to be afraid. But now it is. Nothing can change it or spoil it again."

He had gone on driving, mechanically, while she talked, because there was nothing else that he could do. The tide of traffic still swept them along as they turned into Water Street and swung up to the wharf. A dozen cars were already parked there, and the chauffeurs who had driven the more pretentious ones were now lounging around on the running boards, gossiping with each other, according to the manner of their kind. In a few moments, after the last guest had gone up the gangplank, their stories would take on a lewder character, there would be great guffaws of laughter and possibly a surreptitious game of craps, such as Pearl Gray had once described to Bob. Now, though they were already relaxed, they still spoke respectfully and tipped their caps to the Mortons. An officer was standing at the head of the gangplank, and just beyond him Albert and Betty Lichtenstein were welcoming their guests. Though drinks were also being served in the saloon, most of these guests were already drifting out to the quarterdeck. A long narrow table, in the shape of a double L, was set up under a string of Japanese lanterns that hardly swayed in the still air. It was very hot. The men had on white dinner coats, and looked reasonably comfortable. The women were all wearing light dresses, laces and nets and pale prints. Zoe's crisp organdie stood out among them, stiff and snowy, as she moved forward. It was the prettiest dress there, just as she was the most striking woman. Bob saw this instantly, as he had seen it at so many gatherings before, and he knew by the look in other men's eyes that they saw it too. She advanced without apparent haste, and yet faster than he could follow her, which was so characteristic too. Presently she was standing by Ambrose Estabrook, talking to him without over-intentness, or without the air of trying to shut anyone else out. But

Bob realized that what the Assistant Secretary was saying was important, and that he was not saying it to anyone but Zoe.

Helen and Guy were surrounded at the moment, so Bob did not try to speak to them, but threaded his way around among the other guests. Welby and Veronique had come up from Hunter's Green for this dinner; they were going out a good deal more now and they were welcome guests everywhere. Seated in an easy-chair, with only a light cane beside him, Welby's disability was hardly noticeable at all. Ronnie kept close to him, and Bob knew that when the signal to go to the dinner table was given she would unobtrusively summon one of the other men to help her get Welby to his feet; but the gesture would be so fleeting, and so casual, that only the friend on whom she called would see it, and Welby did not mind having Ronnie help him, as Bob would have hated, to the end of time, to be dependent on Zoe. The relationship between the two husbands and wives was very different. But Bob was not unmindful of the beauty and strength of the tie which bound Ronnie and Welby together, and he felt more closely drawn to them himself every time he saw them. He was glad of the chance to stop and speak to them now.

"How's my friend Bennie?" he asked. Bennie and he had been great friends ever since the child had confided his hopes of a little brother to Bob, and he asked the question because he was really interested, and not as a matter of form.

"Oh, he's fine. He started off this morning to the Leny Manor Horse Show all by himself, as proud as Punch. He looked pretty trick, too, in a get-up he chose quite independently—a black velvet hunting cap, a tan linen coat and jodhpurs. His mare, Polly, has a little foal that takes all the jumps with her. Really, the three of them together are too cute for words."

Ronnie spoke with pardonable pride. She had a right to be proud, too, Bob thought. Bennie was a very fine little boy, and the twins were coming along famously, not to mention the baby, who had been named Victor for his step-grandfather, to the poor old Italian's unspeakable delight. There was not much pleasure in his life nowadays, and the baby's baptism had marked a red-letter day for him. Another good deed on Ronnie's part, Bob said to himself. Unbidden, almost unwelcome, the thought flickered through his mind that he would be proud, too, if he had a little boy going off by himself to a horse show, with his own pony, and his own outfit; and when it came to a question of baptisms he began to wonder whether Zoe would want to name the baby Bob and how pleased his own father would be if she did. Robert Morton III—it had a solid American sound. But on further consideration he somehow hoped the baby would be a girl, like the one they had lost, and, strangely enough, he did not think he would want to name her Zoe. There would never be but one Zoe for him, and she would have ideas of

her own on the subject. He would not put it past her to want to name her baby Marie Alphonse, if it were a girl.

Ronnie was looking very handsome as well as very proud. She was more elaborately dressed than most of the other women, in the green brocade she had worn at Helen's wedding. But this was the sort of thing that became her. She was wearing her emerald necklace too, and Althea's bracelet. Seeing these ornaments, Bob remembered that he had meant to buy Zoe a jewel of some sort, and that he had never done anything about it after all. Zoe was the only woman there, he saw now, who did not have on some sort of an ornament besides her engagement ring; the necklace Helen had given her would have been unsuitable with the white organdie, and she had no other. Well, he would go to Galt's the first thing in the morning, before he even went to the office. Darn it though, how could he? He must get to the Hill early—the amendments to the Labour Relations Act were scheduled to come up in the House. He would have no time to chase around town buying jewellery. Besides, considering what Zoe had told him, would it be better to save more, to start a fund right away for the kid's education? If they were really going to have a kid they must do their very best by it. They must spare it the hard knocks they had had themselves and save it the struggle. If—he still couldn't believe that they were. He still couldn't believe it would be all right this time. As vividly as if it were yesterday he remembered that ghastly night in the hospital—"Everything is perfectly normal and I think in about three hours more . . ." "I'm afraid I have some very bad news for you . . ."

Ronnie was saying something to him about Saratoga, but he hardly heard her. He made a vague remark, which would have served as an answer to almost anything, and, turning to see who else was there, found himself confronted by Giles Arnold. He had heard that the Admiral was back from China, his two years of sea duty over; but Bob had not previously seen him. He was dumbfounded at the change that had come over Giles, who looked like an elderly and harassed man. Of course, the Yangtze Patrol was no cinch in these days, and Bob seemed to remember rumours about a bad attack of dengue fever, or something of the sort, with complications afterwards. He supposed responsibility of the type Giles had had, not to mention a long tropical illness, could age a man quickly, when he was no longer young in any case; but looking at him, Bob wondered how he could ever have been jealous of such a desiccated figure. "Burnt out," Helen had called him. The expression had been apt, even when she first used it, but it was far more apt now. His thankfulness that his sister had not married Giles increased by leaps and bounds. And yet he could not help feeling sorry for the man. What was ahead of him, except some dull duty in Washington, and then retirement, the date of which might well be advanced because of his ill-health? Then he would

potter around, without purpose or pleasure, deprived of the authority which had become a habit to him, shorn of the glamour which from youth had surrounded him. Probably, since he had money, he would stay on in Washington, making as much as he could of his handsome house and his superlative cook; he would not sink into decrepitude at some sleepy tidewater town, as Bob had seen so many retired officers do. And possibly, if Stephen Windsor died, or if Isabel could arrange to divorce the poor drivelling idiot and support him with Giles' money, Giles and Isabel might still be married, now that she could no longer play havoc with his career, and he could no longer hope for the fresh, untarnished love of some younger woman. It would be a tame, tawdry ending to their great romance. But stranger things had happened—— Bob stopped to speak with Giles about the agreement, just announced, between Japan and the Soviet, regarding the Manchukuo-Mongolian frontier. But Giles had nothing interesting to offer on the subject. He acted even more world-weary than he looked. It was obvious that he did not care any more what happened on any frontier.

Isabel herself was at the dinner. Another woman had given out at the last moment, and Betty Lichtenstein, with characteristic kind-heartedness, had asked her to fill in, for she knew that hardly anyone did invite Isabel to dinner any more, except in that way, and she had never learned of her ex-secretary's despicable attack on Zoe. Isabel had "kept her figure," in the sense that she had not put on weight or grown dumpy or dowdy; but she was skinny rather than slender now, and there were telltale lines around her mouth and eyes, and a break in the curve underneath her chin, which had once been so smooth and exquisite. She still wore her clothes well and did her hair carefully. But her black dress, though it bore unmistakable signs of having come from a good place, was long past its first freshness; indeed, it was actually rusty; and around her temples her hair looked as if it had been touched up a little. Well, after all, Isabel was in her middle forties, and she possessed neither the disposition nor the gifts to adapt herself to the straitened circumstances which had come to her when she had so long been lapped in luxury. It was almost as fantastic to think that she should have had the power to twice alter the course of Zoe's life as it was to think that Giles had once been passionate and purposeful. But Bob, who now felt only pity for Giles, still failed to forgive Isabel for the misery she had caused Zoe. He bowed to her briefly, using her eagerness to get to his sister, now that the crowd around her had cleared somewhat, as a pretext for not stopping to speak.

He went over to Helen and kissed her, giving his hand to Guy at the same time. Since this second marriage of hers the tie between them, which had once been so close and which had been loosened during her long absence in Latin-America and his long

period of aberration, seemed to be stronger again; and the more he saw of his new brother-in-law the better he liked him. The three stood talking together, feeling each other's company sufficient. It was on the tip of Bob's tongue to ask Helen if she realized how many of the same persons were present as at their first Washington party and in what different capacities. Fortunately he bit the words back in time, remembering that it had been Alfredo who had been asked to fill in at Greystone Towers; with a lesser pang, remembering also that Mrs. Endicott's party had been given in honour of the French Ambassador, and that now not even such a good friend as René de Blonville was asked to the same dinner as Helen and Guy.

His father and mother came up and joined them, Mrs. Morton emanating triumphant satisfaction, her husband wearily content. Bob spoke to his father about some pending legislation in the Senate, and then involuntarily reverted to the advance of the Germans in speaking to Guy. They had crossed first the Seine and then the Marne; they had taken Verdun. Now that Paris had been declared an open city and the Government had fled from it, Reynaud had said that only a miracle could save France; but he believed that this would still take place, declaring that France herself was a miracle. Zoe believed this too. Only that afternoon Bob had heard her talking to Mary about it, passionately but confidently. He could not bring himself to share her confidence.

Guy shook his head sadly, and before he could answer Mrs. Morton had embarked on a decided, though uninspired, opinion. But just at that moment the hostess gave the signal to move forward towards the table. This was informally done, for the distances on deck did not permit a procession. Bob, placed between Ronnie and Marie Basanta, noted with passing interest how few officials, comparatively speaking, were present. Since the dinner was in honour of Guy and Helen, naturally no one who outranked them had been asked; but Bob would have expected a more liberal sprinkling of senators and a greater number of minor diplomats. Besides his father there was only the beguiling Chairman of Foreign Affairs from "the greatest legislative body in the world"; and besides the Counsellor and First Secretary of the British Embassy, there were only the Chargés d'Affaires of Chile and Venezuela. To be sure, Ambrose Estabrook was there and the usual number of "alphabet" functionaries; but that was a small proportion of the total number of guests, judged by old standards. On the other hand, there were six journalists besides Zoe and himself, not to mention Mr. and Mrs. Kahn, the publishers of the *Examiner*. It was a far cry from the day when he had argued with his mother that she was unreasonable not to let him ask that "red-headed newspaper girl" to Sunday night supper—

The melon balls, mingled with mint in glass cups embedded in ice, were very good. So was the hot consommé, with slices of lime

floating in it, which followed. The Lichtensteins' chef was a genius, and Betty supervised all menus herself. Chilled salmon with clear green cucumber jelly, a crown roast of lamb with flaky rice, brilliant infinitesimal peas, and creamed corn mixed with chopped green peppers, followed each other in leisurely succession. At first Bob ate almost nothing, and tasted nothing that he did eat. He kept thinking about Zoe and wishing that he could see her; but she was on the other side of the double L, diagonally across the narrow table from the hostess. A Cæsarian section! The very sound of it was ominous. Yet, as he continued to think about it, his reason told him that however fraught with peril it might be, the operation would preclude the long-drawn-out agony of that so-called "normal birth," which had cost the life of the other child. And was it, after all, as perilous as his imagination pictured it? Perhaps Zoe had told him the truth when she said obstetrics had made great strides. Perhaps she was not merely trying to reassure him. Perhaps everything would be all right—

He wondered if she had said anything to Helen, and decided that probably she had not. It was more likely that if she had spoken to anyone this had been Veronique. She and Helen were devotedly attached to each other; but there was not the same bond between them as there was between the two women who were so akin in fearlessness and determination, little as they resembled each other in other ways. He could picture Veronique telling Zoe, triumphantly, that she was going to have still another child, and Zoe answering, even more triumphantly, that she too was pregnant. Neither childlessness nor fecundity had ever been a vital issue with Helen; Bob had never heard that she experienced any undue regret because her first marriage had been childless; and though Bob imagined that Guy would want children, since the heritage of Star Hundred was traditionally safeguarded by healthy heirs, a failure on Helen's part to provide them would not be the tragedy it might once have been now that nothing was safeguarded by anything—

It certainly was very pleasant on the yacht. The lanterns were swinging gently now, for a little breeze had sprung up. The heat of the preceding day was tempered more mercifully than it usually was on a June night in Washington. The serving men moved silently and skilfully among the guests. The Heidsieck was rising now in clear cold foam above the graceful glasses into which it was poured, and presently, after the pineapple ice had been removed, there would be mellow cognac in great thin curved goblets. The perfect food and drink, the skilled service, the soft air, had all wrought wonders for Bob. He remembered suddenly that he had eaten no lunch, that he had rushed about all day in the heat without stopping. No wonder he was on edge. No wonder everything upset him. But that did not exonerate him from speaking the way

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he had to Zoe. He would tell her he was sorry he had done so. He would try to tell her he was glad there was going to be another baby. He must be very gentle with Zoe from now on——

There seemed to be some sort of stir on the opposite side of the table. Unable to control his curiosity he turned slightly in his seat. The Lichtensteins' steward was leaning over Guy, saying something to him in a respectful undertone. The light cast by the swaying lanterns and the shaded candles was pleasantly soft. Nevertheless, Bob could see that the agreeable expression on Guy's face had suddenly gone blank, that the ruddy colour had faded from it; though he could not hear the words he was aware of a swiftly stifled exclamation. Then Guy leaned closer to Mrs. Lichtenstein, rising as he did so. At the same instant Zoe pushed back her chair and crossed the deck quickly to the place where Bob was sitting.

"France has fallen," she said in a stunned voice. "Reynaud's resigned. The Maginot Line's been abandoned. Guy's just had a message. Come on, Bob. We must get back to the office."

"It can't be true," he answered. He had been the one to keep saying that it was inevitable, but now that the inevitable had happened he did not believe it. He looked at her numbly for a moment without moving. Then he heard the words repeated around the table like a countersign, but in a hushed way, as if the speakers were talking in the presence of death.

"France has fallen. France has fallen. France has fallen——"

Above the muted tones of the others Zoe spoke to him again.

"No, it can't be. But it is. Bob, we've got to go."

He followed her, almost unseeing, to the gangplank. Guy and Helen were immediately behind them, and Helen was saying something sweet and soothing to her husband, who was steadfastly replying that England would fight on whatever happened. Bob and Zoe did not say anything to each other. They climbed into their car and drove off, still silently. Bob knew that Zoe could not speak, and that she did not want him to speak to her. She was thinking about the fall of France, and by these thoughts she was engulfed in grief, as she would have been if a human being very near and dear to her had died. His heart went out to her in compassion, but he realized that he could not fully share her sorrow or fathom her thoughts because he had not known France as she did or loved it as she did. Therefore, since he might say the wrong thing it was better to say nothing, at least until this first terrible shock had passed. He drove quietly and quickly, without looking at her, and she sat staring straight ahead of her, apparently seeing nothing. But she was seeing a great deal——

She was seeing the red rooftops of Paris rising against the milky sky as they had when she looked out of her dormer windows on the Rue Madame. She was seeing, from Giles's terrace on the Quai d'Orleans, the fussy little boats that crowded the Seine and the

twin towers of Notre Dame etched against the clear clouds. She was seeing the little thatched cottage on the river near Moret, where Ted and Connie had raised their "family" of ponies and where she had helped them roast geese over the spit. She was seeing the ruddy glow of the fire at Chambord, and the Loire flowing quietly past the plane trees at Amboise. She was seeing the rainbow-coloured lights on the fountains at Versailles, and the countryside around Lisieux, covered with "the fragrant snow of spring" in apple blossom time. She was seeing the old mill at Pont Audemer, with the vision of Madame Bovary leaning insolently against it as she looked at her lover. She was seeing the grey grotto at Lourdes, with the majestic figure of Mère Marie Alphonse kneeling beside her in the grey mist. She was seeing the dark bridge of the *San Pedro*, with the captain of the cargo boat pointing towards the black shapes of unlighted ships on a sea of silver——

"Are you still there beside me, Zoe? Or are you about three thousand miles away?"

She started slightly in her seat and turned towards him, at first still unseeingly as far as her actual surroundings were concerned. Then she pulled herself together with a pitiful attempt at a smile.

"I'm afraid I was about three thousand miles away. But I'm back now. What is it?"

"Will you do something for me? Something that'll be hard for you?"

"I'm not afraid of doing hard things. You know that."

"All right. When we get to the Press Building I want you to stay in the car. I want you to leave me there and drive along home without me. I'll get a lift from someone else later on. I'll take everything in hand at the office, call the others back if I can't manage it alone. But I don't want you to write a story tonight. I want you to get to bed. I'll come home myself as soon as I can. Meanwhile I want to know that you'll be where it's quiet, that you'll be resting."

"You know I can't do that. You know I have to write my story. You know this is one of the biggest stories of all time. It is my biggest story—my special story. The one that means more to me than any ever has before or ever will again."

"Yes, I know. But I want you to let me write it."

"You mean because you can write it better than I could? Because I made a mistake? Because I said a miracle would save France, that it wouldn't fall? You think I'm not any good as a journalist any more?"

"No, it isn't that. I swear it isn't. I think you're the greatest journalist I know. There isn't anyone living that can guess right every time. I'm not sure even yet you have made a mistake. What I mean is, France has fallen now, but I believe it'll rise again. I believe the resurrection that Reynaud spoke of will come to pass

and that this will be a greater miracle than the one that didn't. I believe that when you chose your title 'For Ever France,' you weren't using a catch phrase. You were voicing a fundamental truth. And I'm not trying to steal your thunder, or break the promise I made never to interfere with your work. I'd no more think of trying to stop you from writing than from breathing. I want you to go on writing at home, when and as you feel like it. But I hope to God you won't go in for the grind of office work these next few months. If you write this news story you won't stop. You won't be able to. It means too much to you. You'll go on and on, writing about all the horrible things that are bound to happen in France. And this time you've got to stop. I can't help thinking that if you'd taken care of yourself before, if you hadn't driven yourself so hard, things might have come out differently. And I've blamed myself, because if I hadn't acted the way I did you wouldn't have tried so desperately to show me that nothing need be changed in our life. This time I want it to be changed. This time I'm going to take care of you, as well as I can, instead of driving you to desperation. This time you've got to have the baby and get well afterwards yourself. This time you and the baby have got to come first."

"I'll be all right, and so will the baby," she began. But her voice broke as she said it. She sat very still, and Bob, knowing that he had scored at last, went urgently on.

"This may be our last chance, you know," he said. "We were married two years before we had the first one, and that was nearly ten years ago. Now you're thirty-six and I'm nearly forty. Of course, I hope that if everything does go all right, if you come through with flying colours, the way you think you will, there'll be another. I've always thought it was tough luck to have an only child, tough on the child and on the parents too. You never expected me to say I'd like to have two children, did you, Zoe? Well, I'm saying it now. But we can't be sure. It looks as if the cards were sort of stacked against us, doesn't it? It isn't any time to risk everything on one throw."

She continued to sit very still, and he repeated his question.

"Is it?"

"No, I suppose not, if you put it that way. But——"

"France has fallen now, Zoe. She was riddled through and through with rottenness, as you said yourself. It was too much for her. Even if she does rise again, as we both hope and believe, it won't be for a long time. Reynaud's right again when he says that whatever happens in the next few days she's going to suffer. And nothing you write can change what's happened already or what's going to happen next. It is too late to do that. But America's facing some of the same dangers that caused the downfall of France, and it isn't too late to keep her from falling a prey to them. You've

been thinking, as we came along, of all the beauties of France that have meant so much to you; don't imagine I can't realize that. But when you get over the shock of all this you'll see the situation in better perspective and remember the unpleasant impressions and experiences too. For you've pointed out the dangers I'm talking about over and over again: the complacency where there ought to have been alarm; the indolence where there ought to have been industry; the corruption where there ought to have been integrity . . ."

"I can point them out again. I can say all that better than I've ever said it before."

"Yes! You can. At least, you could. But I hope you won't, except as you feel impelled to do so spontaneously, within the limits of your strength. But not under contract. Not as your share of house and office upkeep. I don't want you to go on ploughing through mountains of mimeographed rubbish, tramping miles of marble corridors to ask questions of pompous bureaucrats, wading through rivers of congressional bombast. It's too much. Pour out your soul when you must. But don't do it just because of suiting our subscribers or helping to shoulder our financial load."

"Isn't that part of my share in safeguarding the future?"

"No, not now. You've chosen for yourself that your share should be in building up the future. America's going to need the new generation and you've wanted a child more than anything in the world. I'll be able to write most of those stories about France that are pushing in the back of your mind because you've taught me how to do it. I won't do it as well as you would, but I can do it. Give me a chance, Zoe, and see if I don't."

He took hold of her hand and grasped it hard. His voice was husky with earnestness.

"See if I can't do the work and take care of you too. You and the baby. All three of us. More than that, maybe. But that many, anyhow. That many first. If every husband and father tries to do that, as hard as I'll try, there won't be any need of worrying about the future of America. Because it will be sound at the core."

They were in front of the Press Building. Bob switched off the engine and waited. She did not move, but presently she looked up at him. There were tears in her eyes, but her mouth was steady. She nodded. Bob leaned over and kissed her before he got out of the car.

"My, but you're a grand girl, Zoe," he said. "I can't tell you how proud I am of you. So long. I'll be seeing you soon. Meanwhile don't forget that you're my high particular. You're tops. You're the grandest girl in the whole world."

